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THREE GALLANT PLAYS

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A Byzantine Afternoon

Beauty and the Beast

The Slippers of Aphrodite

BY FERNAND NOZIÈRE

TRANSLATED

BY CLARENCE STRATTON

New York

WILLIAM EDWIN RUDGE

1929

842
Noziere

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J'ai craint le courreaux céleste.

MOLIÈRE—*Don Juan*

281525

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FERNAND NOZIÈRE

THE fairies — if fairies they were — who floated on the air above the cradle of Fernand Nozière, for by this name Fernand Weyl wishes to be known, did not sear his lips with a burning coal. Instead they just flicked his mouth with the tips of their immaterial fingers, dusting upon his temperament a delicacy and lightness that have been always the most marked characteristic of everything he has written for the French stage.

The Parisian salons of the nineties — and the nineties in Paris mixed upon the palette of the decade more than a mere mauve — knew him: — light,

careless, scintillating — above all, observing and absorbing. Literature? Certainly. All cultured gentlemen had at their tongues' ends the clever polished phrases of the masters of the eighteenth century, and all good conversationalists had at their wits' ends the philosophical opinions of those same daring and dazzling thinkers. Writing? One might if one wished to do so, but not too seriously, perhaps. Life was hardly worth getting excited about in any case.

One is now tempted to believe that the youthful Nozière was writing more sedulously and more carefully than he ever let acquaintances know. His first paper in an obscure review might have remained forever unknown to us, but the ferreting eye of the editor of *Le Temps* fell upon it. And as real life sometimes imitates art (to quote Oscar Wilde) the great man invited the unknown youngster to contribute to the dignified daily. And as art can duplicate its own fictional successes, so less frequently may the life that imitates art, this first article in the newspaper was spied by the editor of *L'Illustration,* who in turn invited the beginner to contribute to his periodical. So

for a long period the future Fernand Nozière — then calling himself André Fagel — wrote steadily. Gradually he turned to dramatic criticism, and then, inoculated by the inevitable virus, to the composition of plays themselves.

Never fired with the rage of prophecy, never vexed to literary assault and battery, never whipped to a rage over abuses, never inspired by a doctrine, Fernand Nozière has contentedly and competently written successful dramas — some score or more — of all lengths, of all varieties, of all periods. Giving always the impression of the literary dilettante, somewhat always the aristocrat with a happy knack, somewhat always the detached artist, Nozière spreads the impression that he is usually dragged into the theater, that he would much rather cultivate himself than concoct plots, unless — and in this lies the essence of his charm — he may be allowed to elaborate carefully and delicately some theme stimulated in his imagination by the power of some already existing literary masterpiece. In England only a few artists such as Mr. Aldous Huxley realize the fanciful charm

of literary allusion, the power of gracious erudition; but French literature is always marked by the acceptance of the scholarly tradition. Jules Lemaître dared conceive two volumes of his short stories with the title *On the Margins of Old Books*.

It is to such imaginative stimulation that Nozière turns most gratefully. Yet often what one feels is his natural selection has been supplemented by the deliberate invitation and arranging of outside influences. Several years ago Paul Reboux produced a novel, *La Maison de Danses*. Charles Muller made a play of it. (If you like the uniques of literature, you should remember that these two men later wrote those delicious satiric criticisms under the disguise of literary parodies in the various series of *A la Manière de* and dealt exaggeratedly with the woes of European travel in *Rikette aux Enfers*.) But the exotic, the bizarre, above all the romantic are Nozière's milieu, so he was called in by the producer to make of Muller's drama an acting stage play. Just twenty years ago it was one of the decided successes of the Théâtre du Vaudeville.

Tricks of course there are in the plot, but the cabaret in Cadiz lives in the squalor, the passion, the truckling, the superstition, the music, the vehemence of the persons cajoled, stirred, and deceived by Estrella, the serving drudge who becomes the alluring dancer, great — yes, great enough at the end to escape from her three persecuting lovers and deserve a place in the theaters of Paris. What more could a Parisian audience ask? What more could a shrewd boulevardier do for a girl? So easy is it to see all that glitters on the surface of this story of passion that a reader may miss the touches of deeper reality — if not of realism. The flight to Paris may appear to be only the apotheosis of the Parisian, yet is it not more: — is it not the culmination of that heart cry for the exaltation of the artist? We may see in Estrella merely the courtesan dancer; yet may she not be at the end the symbol that follows after reality: — the symbol of woman who leads yet who eludes all men?

With Alfred Savoir as collaborator Nozière produced under the lead of Tolstoi *La Sonate à Kreutzer,* which by one of those delicate little ironies of

French nomenclature is called, in spite of the husband's strangling his wife to death before the last speech of the play, a comedy. To be entirely accurate, there is hardly a speech after the assassination, for the only sound the unspeakable Russian makes as he drops his wife's body is "Ouf!" The title indicates the tragic conclusion, of course, but it is almost impossible during most of the action to believe that there must be sacrifice at the end. Nozière is so essentially the habitué of the salon, the associate of the sophisticate, that he perforce makes his Russian egocentrics trace outside edges on thin ice.

The suspecting husband tries to induce the pianist friend to boast of his conquests. There have been capitulations, the latter admits, but he adds ruefully that the vogue of musicians has fallen with the rise of aviation. Though we in the audience have been harrowed by the report of the wife's attempted suicide, we are led to snicker nervously when the calculating husband, having learned that the effects of morphine would become apparent in four minutes remembers that she called wildly for help before two

minutes had elapsed. His whole future will be mastered by her flourishing a phial, which may after all, contain absolutely nothing. His children? What assurance has he in them? What comfort can he draw from their talents when he listens to the pseudo-scientific ramblings of his doctor uncle?

"Isn't precocity a result of alcohol? If your little daughter shows much talent for music, it may be because you took a drop too much Kümmel one evening."

When he doesn't write of Saigon, or French Africa, or Madagascar, or Siam, or Spain (and Nozière as we have seen did use that country) the romantic Parisian must write of the glory of the patriotic soldier, interpret that patriotic soldier as he will, whether with Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables,* or with Emile Zola in *Le Débacle,* or with Guy de Maupassant in *Mdlle. Fifi.* Nozière could no more resist the call than an infant can the *petite vérole volante* (pardon, the chicken-pox); only, he did inject an element of originality into his treatment of the glory that is the soldier's by arranging with his colleague

Lucien Descaves to dramatize the Paris Commune of 1870. This choice exemplifies the audacity of talent, if not of genius, for of all the sordid and futile gestures of Parisian history, this crazy dream was perhaps the least rational.

Like most plays dealing with military events, *La Saignée* is hardly more than a series of dramatized episodes, culminating in the theatrical trick of the return to Paris ten years later of the sturdy patriot Mulard, who surrounded by a mob at the Porte St. Martin obligingly halts his fiacre and from its step harangues about the old tried and true triplets — liberty, equality, fraternity.

The period was a difficult one to render appealingly to a modern audience, yet the play was a grand success at the Ambigu. One would guess that it must have been. Theater and treatment were skilfully mated. The scenes are colorful, moving despite their generally somber tone, varied from pathetic to violent, yet they seem more like a course in recent history than a drama, more like a broad fresco in reddened tints than a performance.

Where else shall a derivative literary experimenter seek influence and inspiration? In Russia certainly. With M. Bienstock, Nozière concocted a play based on Dostoievski's strange story, *The Idiot.* Only *The Brothers Karamazov* has successfully put Dostoievski's ingrown persons on the stage. Even the skill of these two clever craftsmen of the theater and the acting of Mme. Rubenstein could not carry this drama to anything higher than a *succès d'estime.*

The assured weight of most classic novels prevents their satisfactory dramatization. Nozière's next venture with Russian material was happier because initiated and consummated in a manner entirely different. Nicolai Evreinov was in Paris. Nozière wished to translate or adapt the unusual fantasy *The Essential,* in which the bitter antagonist of the Moscow Art Theater's school of realism (so out-moded in western Europe now) toyed like a fanciful child with characters and fate, indifferently juggling fact and extravagance, reality and dream, truth and paradox, until a spectator is bewildered by the rushing waves of change and seeming inconsequence.

The Russian stage director read his script to Nozière word by word, commenting freely on all the implications of his bare text. This produced a literal translation over which the Frenchman worked under the directions of the original author. Together they cut the manuscript (joy of joys, that a Russian should consent to some telescoping of his creation!) until the departure of Evreinov to the United States made further adaptation impossible. In 1926, then, on the stage of the Théâtre de L'Atelier, this amusing and arresting comedy under the title *La Comédie d'Amour* was displayed to a bemused public, months before the world was swept off its critical feet by the avalanche of Pirandelloism from Italy. The Russian dramatist, though miles from the realism of Stanislavsky, was a foe to any obscurity, no matter how explained by canons of art; therefore his philosophical juggling with human emotions is always clearer cut than the Italian's; the passes are made before the spectator's eyes, not in the realm of his subconsciousness. We know his characters for what they are, not for what they seem to be, as is the case with virtually

all (except the play director) in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author.*

In this adaptation from the Russian, Nozière keeps the exotic flavor of the invention, the situations, and the persons. He preserves convincingly the illusion of fiction trespassing on reality. Fantasy rules; at times forgetting to remain fantasy and evolving into satire of modern society and ancient opinions.

Here again, Nozière announces his belief in the reality of unreality, in the power of the intangible. "You begin to realize," remarks one person of the play, "that illusion is stronger in life than on the stage."

That dictum might almost be called the dramatic and critical creed of Fernand Nozière.

To tell the truth Nozière is less skilful — in conception of plot, at least — when he is dealing alone with his own original matter.

In a Paris bar just at closing time René meets Francine Stowe, whom he loved long years ago, now the widow of a wealthy American. Debonair, attractive, careless, he has attempted all the delicate

vices and blown away all his losses with a farewell kiss accompanied by a nonchalant shrug. But now his gambling has cost him the loss of his home; nothing remains for him but the gentlemanly act of blowing a nonchalant kiss with the tips of his fingers to the gay old world. From this Francine saves him, with the inevitable result that she becomes his mistress. In a French play it is as dangerous for a man to be saved by a woman as it is in an American one for him to save her from drowning or from mangling by a speeding motor car. So far there is no real conflict in the story of *Notre Amour,* acted in 1926.

Nozière concocts his struggle late in the action. The love of Francine and René deserves more than voluntary association — though why in Paris is rather difficult to understand. He will marry her, and the relationship seems easy enough to adjust, except that those troublesome old dramatic laws handed down time out of mind by the ancient Greeks and fastened on modern literary practitioners by the classic procedures of the seventeenth century dramatists in France demand some wrestling of the protagonist against

external fate or his own eternal soul. René, then, must develop scruples or assume them. In one way or the other — or by combining both methods — he gets them: — he will marry Francine but not her fortune.

This seems like rather a shabby genteel trick, for after the author has trumped up a soul struggle for his hero this worthy immediately shifts it from his own lacerated soul to the heart of his mistress. The conflict rages through the last act until she magnanimously disposes of it by a last minute denouement. She will have her husband by relinquishing her money. One may ask what of the life of the two after the last curtain falls, but Nozière would adroitly declare that anything not in the play need not concern us.

In *Notre Amour* — as in everything Nozière pens — there are delightful stretches, but as a whole the play is merely so-so.

A closer gripping of realistic facts of the lives of two persons is shown us in *Le Marie d'Aline*. A singer makes a successful debut. Will this change her

feeling for her faithful but humble suitor? Most experts in French artistic circles (in literary delineations) would predict that it would. Shall the assured musician accept the dazzling offer of her manager or stay with the worshipping friends of her own fireside? With touches of delicate shading, pretty charm, ingenuous and touching sentiment, Nozière makes her choose humble content.

Later, the feted singer, married to her faithful Fernal, has become the mistress of the wealthy manufacturer who has made her career possible. Borrowing perhaps from Guy de Maupassant, the dramatist shows us how the trusting husband discovers that her imitation pearl necklace is genuine. When his fears are confirmed, what shall the husband do? First, he can deliver his biting opinions of the smart world of Deauville, and finally he can leave his false wife to her despair.

From keen realism this play mellows into delicious romanticism in the last act. Its other delightful contrast is between the healthy bohemianism of the first act and the exotic artificiality of the two succeeding ones.

In another play, produced at the Théâtre Michel in 1926, Nozière deals with a situation almost Zolaesque in its outline and implications. The drama was at first entitled *Le Piège,* and by this name it should have been known on the stage, but there is an opinion stated in the lines that "the flesh has reasons not known by either the brain or the heart"; and in addition there can be a more suggestive title than *Le Piège,* therefore the play is called *La Peau.*

Years before, a pair of lovers departing for South America left behind in rural France their daughter to be reared as a servant by former domestics of theirs. Later found by the lover of the girl's mother, he assumes the responsibility for her and pays the bills. Then very subtly there steals over the girl an appalling transformation. Her melancholy resignation, so affecting to a man, so appealing to an elder, is nothing more than a cloak of hypocrisy. From the covered depths of her disposition stirs and surges her mother's nature. It glows like a resuscitated coal; it burns like a fanned flame; and the sedate man of fifty becomes a prey to the cold and calculating ingenue.

Here in this drama, here for the first time outside the novel is a new idea and an audacious situation. Nozière has in this theme chanced upon or created an amazing complication around and over which his talent glints and darts with comprehending tact that never spoils his gradual analysis. Not often has Nozière sounded such profundities; not often has he risen so high; not often has he been so consistently serious.

It has been said already that Nozière is most delightful in his literary derivativeness. On a theme from Dostoievski he produced *L'Eternal Marie* (1911); on a story from Maupassant *Bel Ami* (1912); on a play by Aristophanes *Les Oiseaux* (1911); on a conte by LaFontaine *Joconde* (1911); on a plot from La Clos *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1907); on a theme from the younger Crebillon *Les Hasards du Coin du Feu* (1907).

For a literary occidental there is always a slight shock when the romanticism of Greek art and life passes over into the realism furnished by learning that the Hellenes colored their statues and painted

their stone temples. Assured as he has been a hundred times that the chief glory of literature of the remote past is that it shows that human nature has never changed; convinced in his own mind that men and women have never on this earth been much better or much worse than they are today; he is nevertheless slightly startled to read those extracts — either ancient or modern — that prove that the spirit of man and the disposition of woman have been immutable through all the passing centuries.

How remote — and therefore romantic — the hetairæ seemed, when called by that euphonious name! How like the creatures in the hotel lobby last evening when delineated as they are by such French masters as Pierre Louÿs, Jules Lemaître, and Fernand Nozière.

In our minds' eyes Byzantium is a glorious conglomeration of *Ben Hur,* the Crusades, Pierre Loti, the early Church Fathers, and *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* With what delicious chuckles, then, do we read Nozière's *A Byzantine Afternoon,* set at a time when "costumes were beautiful and

morals were low." There is a freshness (in both meanings) about this charming resuscitation of the past that disarms any prejudiced criticism. The one-act is a literary and historic gem of a cameo, on the surface of which every character is chiseled delicately and humorously. Too often we forget that early, middle, and later Greeks, those of the rise, the youth, and the decadence of Hellenic culture had an overpowering sense of the ludicrous.

A student of details dramatic is tempted to remark upon the ingenious construction of this gallant little piece. It opens on an unpeopled stage; so we may satisfy our eyes with the setting before any character enters. Initial action and concluding event round the full circle: — the hairy old slave Criton totters on to start the fun; the polished young Clinias moves away after the little dancer; and the stage is unpeopled as the curtain descends.

If you believe that Nozière was brave or reckless in attempting to do something novel with an old Byzantine plot, you will predict disaster for him when you see the title of the second little gallantry.

What in 1909 could a Parisian do with the Beauty and the Beast motif? More than anyone had a right to expect. You can easily imagine the veneered bored feelings of those guests of Comte Robert de Clermont-Tonnerre at Maisons-Lafitte when they read their programs and realized that they were to be regaled with a child's fairy tale. The play can not have progressed through twenty speeches when there must have been a rustling of programs, a clicking of lorgnettes, and a craning of necks. Two lovers are leaving their sweethearts, and yet all through the night one has asked no more than to hold the hand of his adored, the other no more than the delight of bedecking her with jewels! Surely here is French *diablérie* with a vengeance. It is not fair, however, to anticipate at this place your reading of the novel lines, lines so tinted with naiveté that you will chuckle over their saturation in sophistication.

In the third play, *The Slippers of Aphrodite,* there is less restriction of plot because of familiar material, but there is an abundance of familiar material daringly used. The urge to quote is almost irresistible.

Paint in your imagination the *niaiserie* of an Aphrodite who could wonder just why Diana, the goddess of chastity, should rule over the night. Do not pass over the lines too rapidly — as their brilliance will lead you — and thus miss the plain reference to man's present conquest of the air.

The beauty of these two out-of-door entertainments is apparent in every line of speech, in every situation, in every change of characterization; but the grace of the settings, the rhythm of the groupings, the swirl of the ballets, the sound of the music — all these are absent from the reading, unless one can be a Keats and conjure up those unheard melodies, sweeter than any that smite upon the sensual ear.

Nozière, realizing these lacks in the printed pages, makes grateful acknowledgments to the composers, MM. Esteban Marti, Moreau Faivre, and André Fijan.

If you wish pathos, agony, melodrama, and affliction you must look elsewhere among the plays of Fernand Nozière, or among the compositions of the

Paris *surréalistes*. The author of these three short plays warns you in his prefatory note.

"In these dramas there is no discussion of anything except love. There is no dealing with the passion that tortures and kills, but merely the delineation of the delicate intoxication . . . I maintain that it is permissible to feel enthusiasm for measure and moderation."

CLARENCE STRATTON

Cleveland

1929

A Byzantine Afternoon

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

CLINIAS
eighteen, a sculptor

HIPPOLYTUS
twenty-five, a circus charioteer

CRITON
sixty, servant to Xantippe

MYRRHA
twenty-five

XANTIPPE
twenty

LEUCOÉ
eighteen, servant to Myrrha

A DANCER

A BYZANTINE AFTERNOON

BYZANTIUM, at some indefinite period favorable to beautiful costumes and low morals. The stage shows a private room in the house of Myrrha. The principal article of furniture is a low couch, almost a bed. Chairs; a table. Doors to left and right.

After the curtain has risen, there are several knocks on the door. Leucoé crosses the room, stretching herself. She opens the door.

LEUCOÉ

Come in, young sir.

CRITON

(He is a white bearded slave)

By Zeus, you haven't looked at me yet. Notice my white beard, and you won't call me young man.

LEUCOÉ

I thought it was a false beard such as the young men wear over their fresh faces in order to frighten young girls. But to tell the truth, your skin is as pink as the fingers of Aurora and your glances sparkle like the springtide sun.

CRITON

You tell the truth, don't you?

LEUCOÉ

Please sit down, charming Unknown.

(He stretches out on a comfortable chair)

I shall announce to my mistress that you want to speak with her.

CRITON

Here! I don't want to speak with her. I am sent with a message to her. I am the chief slave of Xantippe; my name is Criton.

LEUCOÉ

Get up, you staggering old fool, with your frightful wrinkled face, and your lifeless eyes! Why didn't you tell me at first your miserable rank?

CRITON

Well, you stupid servant, why did you take me for a rich stranger and smear ridiculous flatteries all over me?

LEUCOÉ

They didn't seem so ridiculous to you. You lapped up my sweet lies, and half closed your eyes, and purred like an old cat when his neck is scratched.

CRITON

That's because a man's vanity lasts longer than all his other illusions.

LEUCOÉ

Are you a philosopher, too?

CRITON

Yes; since I'm a slave, I have to be.

LEUCOÉ

You must have come to Xantippe's house only in the last few days, for I don't know you.

CRITON

Only yesterday.

LEUCOÉ

Didn't you tell me you are her chief slave? Just bragging, I suppose?

CRITON

It's the truth.

LEUCOÉ

Why did she raise you so soon to such a confidential post? How did you gain her interest? You've never been handsome, and you're no longer strong.

CRITON

True enough; but I am her uncle.

LEUCOÉ

Oho! Well, my friend, I see that fortune has been cruel to you. You must have lost all your money suddenly.

CRITON

Don't cry over my condition. I am no longer strong enough to do farming. My master, a hard driver, beat me. I ran away to my niece, who is a tender creature.

LEUCOÉ

Yes, the quality of her flesh is famous throughout Byzantium.

CRITON

You make me feel proud.

LEUCOÉ

So Xantippe doesn't come from a wealthy family then, as she is so fond of saying?

CRITON

She is the child of a small farmer, and when she was a youngster, she was a wonder at milking the cows. We used to stand around her in the stable and admire her little hands draining the milk. The warm, nourishing streams would sizzle into the earthenware jugs—

LEUCOÉ

That is her vocation. Now she squeezes the men dry of their money.

CRITON

Clever girl!

LEUCOÉ

But will you give me the message she told you to deliver?

CRITON

If your mistress consents, she will pay a visit to her, and bring along the young Clinias, her lover.

LEUCOÉ

Hush, you ignorant old man; don't say such silly things! Young Clinias is not the lover of Xantippe.

CRITON

Oho! Upstart! You think you know everything, and you don't know anything! Listen to this. This morning I went into her room, and young Clinias had been there all night.

LEUCOÉ

Well, what of that, you tattle-tale?

CRITON

Well, you pigheaded servant, doesn't that give me the right to conclude that Clinias is the lover of Xantippe?

LEUCOÉ

Oh, fool that you are! Don't you know that two Levantine bankers give large amounts of money to Xantippe, and that they are both old and stupid?

CRITON

All Byzantium knows that.

LEUCOÉ

Doesn't their generosity give them the honorable title of lover?

CRITON

Certainly.

LEUCOÉ

And isn't Clinias only a youth with an adorable face, but a flat purse?

CRITON

I admit that.

LEUCOÉ

And you presume to apply to him a word which is used only for rich, ugly, decrepit, old men?

CRITON

Then how shall I describe the relation he has with my mistress?

LEUCOÉ

You ought to keep your mouth shut, and not even notice it.

CRITON

Well, what do you people of Byzantium call a young fellow, who enjoys for nothing the favors of a woman for which some other man pays without getting them at all?

LEUCOÉ

These last are lovers, but the other is the loved one.

CRITON

That's a real difference!

LEUCOÉ

Well, I'm going to announce Xantippe's visit to my mistress. She's already up.

CRITON

I should hope so. The sun will go down soon.

LEUCOÉ

Oh! we always get up rather late.

CRITON

Who was here last night — the lover, or the loved one?

LEUCOÉ

What's that to you?

CRITON

Tell me, tell me! I'm no tale-teller.

LEUCOÉ

But you're curious to know things.

CRITON

Yes, yes.

LEUCOÉ

The loved one. Goodbye, Criton.

CRITON

Goodbye. What is your name?

LEUCOÉ

Leucoé.

CRITON

Goodbye, fair Leucoé.

(Criton goes out. Leucoé starts towards the bedroom door. Just as she reaches it, Hippolytus comes out.)

HIPPOLYTUS

Where are you going!

LEUCOÉ

To give my mistress a message from Xantippe.

HIPPOLYTUS

A letter? Give it to me.

LEUCOÉ

It's not written. I'm only repeating a message brought by a faithful slave.

HIPPOLYTUS

Repeat it to me.

LEUCOÉ

But—

HIPPOLYTUS

Am I master here?

LEUCOÉ

Certainly.

HIPPOLYTUS

That you should lie to the brave old general who comes here to warm up his age and have his wounds soothed, I can easily understand. But to me! You know your mistress adores me! There's nothing she should hide from me! Speak.

LEUCOÉ

Oh, I was silent only on principle. Xantippe sent word that she will soon be here with Clinias.

HIPPOLYTUS

That's all?

LEUCOÉ

That's all.

HIPPOLYTUS

You're not hiding something from me?

LEUCOÉ

Could I try to deceive you? That's all.

HIPPOLYTUS

Humph!

(Leucoé starts towards the room)

Tell me something. You have some feeling for me?

LEUCOÉ

I don't dare. I have to be satisfied with admiring you. When you win in the circus, when your chariot crosses the line first, my heart throbs and I cheer for you.

HIPPOLYTUS

(Taking her hand)

You dear girl!

LEUCOÉ

Oh! Let me go!

HIPPOLYTUS

You are afraid?

LEUCOÉ

I'm careful.

HIPPOLYTUS

That's a mere trifle.

LEUCOÉ

You forget that you love my mistress.

HIPPOLYTUS

Who? Me?

LEUCOÉ

You're jealous of her. Didn't you just excitedly try to get out of me the message I'm to deliver? You fear a rival, so you pet me.

HIPPOLYTUS

Do you know whether I fear a rival, or want one?

LEUCOÉ

What?

HIPPOLYTUS

If I knew that Myrrha is deceiving me, don't you see that I could escape from her tyrannizing passion? I could leave this house. I should be free.

LEUCOÉ

Who keeps you here? Aren't you a man?

HIPPOLYTUS

I'm afraid of hurting her feelings.

LEUCOÉ

You are not a man.

HIPPOLYTUS

I am bound to her by ties of gratitude —

LEUCOÉ

You are not a man.

HIPPOLYTUS

By the memory of our love.

LEUCOÉ

You are not a man.

HIPPOLYTUS

You know how violent she is. No one can foresee to what excesses her grief might drive her.

LEUCOÉ

She might kill herself, perhaps?

HIPPOLYTUS

Or me.

LEUCOÉ

You are a man!

HIPPOLYTUS

How selfish women are! They consider us men their property. They are faithful to us only to enslave us.

LEUCOÉ

Calm yourself. She has deceived you.

HIPPOLYTUS

You are joking!

LEUCOÉ

She has had an affair with Antisthenus.

HIPPOLYTUS

That was to get his country estate.

LEUCOÉ

With old Philemon.

HIPPOLYTUS

To get her debts paid.

LEUCOÉ

With young Gorgias.

HIPPOLYTUS

Because of his valuable jewels.

LEUCOÉ

With Canidia.

HIPPOLYTUS

Pooh! She has never deceived me, and she never will.

LEUCOÉ

Keep your hope up. Pray to the gods, and above all to the clubfooted blacksmith whom Aphrodite made an eternal laughing stock.

HIPPOLYTUS

O ugly, twisted god, you of the hard and horny hands, inspire Myrrha, my mistress, with the desire to deceive me! Let me surprise her in the act as you came upon your spouse and her warrior when you snared them in the golden meshes of your net! Thanks shall I render you, and every week shall I sacrifice to you two bullocks with curling horns! This offering I shall make in the little house I shall buy just beyond the city, where I shall live with the gentle maiden who loves my horses and their driver — where I shall live with Leucoé!

LEUCOÉ

Oh! You are making sport of your servant.

HIPPOLYTUS

No, no! I am not jesting. I have strong arms and a simple soul. The gods will be favorable to our union.

MYRRHA

(She enters brusquely)

What are you doing here, lazy? While you are babbling nonsense here, who is taking care of the house? Have you given the orders to the cook and the musicians? Are the flowers arranged for the tables? Get a move on, you worthless servant!

LEUCOÉ

The slave of Xantippe came to announce that she is coming here soon with Clinias.

MYRRHA

Good! You may go.

(Leucoé bows and disappears)

To tell the truth, I wonder what you can have to say to that stupid good-for-nothing, who smells of the cookstove.

HIPPOLYTUS

She has one great virtue; she is mild-tempered.

MYRRHA

And I'm hot-headed; is that what you mean?

HIPPOLYTUS

I never thought of comparing you with your servant.

MYRRHA

You consider her above comparisons?

HIPPOLYTUS

O Myrrha, can you be jealous of this girl?

MYRRHA

I am jealous of all women.

HIPPOLYTUS

You flatter me.

MYRRHA

Oh, don't be vain-glorious over that. If they all are after you, it is merely because you belong to me. They only want to win you away from my tenderness. Yesterday Phyllis threw flowers to you. Do you believe she was interested in the race you won?

HIPPOLYTUS

I don't know. I didn't even see her.

MYRRHA

She threw the roses which struck you in the eye.

HIPPOLYTUS

Oh, no! That was old Creusa who was trying to blind me.

MYRRHA

So, you look at them all who admire you! You count them! You smile at them!

HIPPOLYTUS

I mock them.

MYRRHA

You love Myrrha only?

HIPPOLYTUS

Yes.

MYRRHA

You swear it?

HIPPOLYTUS

By the eternal gods!

MYRRHA

That's a weak oath.

HIPPOLYTUS

Shall I add thundering Zeus and the Styx?

MYRRHA

No! You are superstitious. Swear upon your own life. May you die if you are lying!

HIPPOLYTUS

Enough of this childishness!

MYRRHA

Swear!

HIPPOLYTUS

Enough of this! You know how your unjust reproaches irritate me. Don't keep harping on one thing!

MYRRHA

Swear at least by the head of this Phyllis.

HIPPOLYTUS

I swear. Are you satisfied at my obedience? Are you calm now?

MYRRHA

Almost. She's such a nobody, this Phyllis. Swearing by her head you are swearing by nothing. Isn't that so?

HIPPOLYTUS

I am saying nothing.

MYRRHA

You think she's attractive?

HIPPOLYTUS

Who?

MYRRHA

Phyllis.

HIPPOLYTUS

What, again?

MYRRHA

Her faded yellow hair looks like a bundle of straw, and she's such a beast that it's a wonder she didn't die last winter when she sank so low that she had to herd with the sailors on the waterfront. She might please soldiers and drunkards.

HIPPOLYTUS

Charming!

MYRRHA

You defend her? Just let her look at you when you get down from your chariot! I'll scratch her eyes out!

HIPPOLYTUS

Yes?

MYRRHA

You don't believe me? You don't know what I would do to keep you. I adore you! No other woman could love you as I do.

HIPPOLYTUS

I hope not!

MYRRHA

What do you mean?

HIPPOLYTUS

Nothing.

MYRRHA

Tell me; tell me! Have the courage at least to speak out! Don't keep up this hypocritical silence! Have you any complaints to make to me? You know I live only for you. I've given you my entire life. It's only fair that I should have yours.

HIPPOLYTUS

No; it's not fair! I daren't go out into the streets! I am afraid I'll glance at a woman and offend you. I have to walk with my eyes turned straight before me. You make me wear blinders, just as my horses do.

Nothing must please me any more, except you, always you. The most innocent pleasures are denied me by your mad passion. I'm tired of it! I want to feel free, to smile, and be happy like other men.

MYRRHA

Like the men who are not loved!

HIPPOLYTUS

Like the men who are loved properly.

MYRRHA

A woman who loves truly never loves properly.

HIPPOLYTUS

Well then, don't love me!

MYRRHA

May it please the heavens that some day I shall not love you! But the time of indifference has not yet arrived. Just think of last night!

HIPPOLYTUS

You ought to be grateful to me and not worry me with taunts.

MYRRHA

Like the glorious races when the chariots dash five times around the course!

HIPPOLYTUS

You love the races?

MYRRHA

I adore them. When you hold me in your arms I feel like your horses which prance, which spring at the touch of the whip, with foam flecked bits, and who madly gallop to victory. Oh; my tamer! Shake me! Let your voice stir me! Strike me if you wish!

HIPPOLYTUS

You are mad!

MYRRHA

You are right. But I've never seen you so calm.

HIPPOLYTUS

I'm tired.

MYRRHA

Liar!

HIPPOLYTUS

And besides, I have to go out.

MYRRHA

You didn't tell me that. Where are you going?

HIPPOLYTUS

To the stables. I'm afraid I drove Phoebus too hard—

MYRRHA

If you had been uneasy about a horse you wouldn't have stayed here so late with me. You are going to meet some woman—it must be Phyllis!

HIPPOLYTUS

How can you imagine that I'm thinking about a woman! All I want is rest and solitude!

MYRRHA

Then you are not even leaving me to go to a rival?

HIPPOLYTUS

Does that annoy you?

MYRRHA

Yes. If a sudden whim were taking you from me, I could at least hope that satiety and boredom would soon drive you back to my house.

HIPPOLYTUS

I shall be back in an hour or two.

MYRRHA

You will come back with a long face, resigned, like a man doing his duty. Even at night you have a sad, grave face which humiliates me.

HIPPOLYTUS

But—

MYRRHA

Go, then; go! Go back to your garret! Drink with your comrades, and pet your unworthy girls. Those are the delights you sigh for. You are not fit to have me. Sink again into the mire I raised you from.

HIPPOLYTUS

What have you done for me? When you got to know me I was already covered with glory. I was the best charioteer in all Byzantium.

MYRRHA

Yes! You had the manners and the dress of a stable-boy.

HIPPOLYTUS

You taught me to have my hair curled, my finger-nails polished, and to dress like this.

MYRRHA

You are right. You no longer smell of the stalls.

HIPPOLYTUS

I smell of your perfume.

MYRRHA

You no longer look like a beast.

HIPPOLYTUS

But I have less character.

MYRRHA

You wear rings.

HIPPOLYTUS

(He snatches off his rings and throws them on the table)

Take them back again.

MYRRHA

Are you going to give me back all the money you got from me to pay your gambling debts?

HIPPOLYTUS

Any other would have been more generous than you.

MYRRHA

Who then? Who then?

HIPPOLYTUS

You know then! They wouldn't be indelicate enough to throw in my teeth the favors they had done me.

MYRRHA

You don't know women yet. If you know any who will give you money they will demand it back when they dismiss you.

HIPPOLYTUS

You are not sending me away. I am leaving you.

MYRRHA

Wretch! And this is the way you desert me!

HIPPOLYTUS

Any method of getting away from a mistress is an awkward one.

MYRRHA

Don't think for an instant I'll let you throw me over this way! I'll raise a scandal. All Byzantium shall know how much you've cost me.

HIPPOLYTUS

They will only laugh at you.

MYRRHA

I'll spread how you have exploited me.

HIPPOLYTUS

That's not true. I never asked you for anything. I didn't even want your love.

MYRRHA

You lie! You lie!

HIPPOLYTUS

It was you — you came to me. You were drawn by my triumphs, my strength, my inexperience —

MYRRHA

Oh!

HIPPOLYTUS

You dragged me from my chariot and led me off to your house without even giving me time to wipe the perspiration from my brow. Here, in this room, you threw yourself into my arms and laid your head against my breast. You inhaled the incense of my youth. Your cheek was scratched by the pieces of gravel which had clung to my clothes during the race.

MYRRHA

Hush! Hush!

HIPPOLYTUS

Then I begged you?

MYRRHA

No! No!

HIPPOLYTUS

And I taught you the kisses which enervate and the caresses which revive? You have robbed me of all my strength.

MYRRHA

You were never stronger. And you've become much wiser.

HIPPOLYTUS

Yes. I accepted your presents! Yes. You have degraded me. —

MYRRHA

My love, pardon me!

HIPPOLYTUS

And that's exactly why you terrify me. You have made of me a venial creature like yourself. I'm like those effeminate men who live on the daughters of joy.

MYRRHA

No! No! You are manly and strong! I adore you!

HIPPOLYTUS

Goodbye, Myrrha.

MYRRHA

Don't leave me!

HIPPOLYTUS

I'm going to gather together what belongs to me. In a few minutes I'll leave your house.

MYRRHA

No! No!

HIPPOLYTUS

(He gathers up the things which he had placed on the table)

Goodbye, Myrrha. Goodbye.

(He goes out)

MYRRHA

(Beyond control)

Leucoé! Leucoé!

(Leucoé runs in)

LEUCOÉ

Why are you calling? Is the house on fire?

MYRRHA

(Gaining the mastery of her feelings)

No! No! Someone knocked. Open the door.

LEUCOÉ

(As she opens the door)

It's Xantippe with Clinias.

MYRRHA

Good.

(Xantippe and Clinias, embracing each other, come in slowly, while Leucoé disappears)

Xantippe

O Myrrha! Why didn't you come this evening to the Promenade of the Happy? It was delicious. I haven't seen such a jam of litters and such a crush of women so elaborately coiffured and so scantily dressed for a perfect age.

Clinias

It's an excellent idea to show such a fashionable, frivolous, and jealous crowd a glimpse of sincere, passionate love. While we were moving along, pressed close to each other, hands and glances interlaced, I could feel the hatred and envy of the other idlers at our perfect happiness.

Xantippe

Love of mine!

Clinias

Dearest!

Xantippe

Don't you think that his color is a little faded and his eyes a little tired, Myrrha?

Myrrha

I congratulate you.

Xantippe

Oh, don't jest about it. My affection for him is quite pure. At times I feel almost like his mother.

MYRRHA

Then you must have known the grief of Lucinus in your cradle, and his child must have been your first doll.

XANTIPPE

He's only a child. I'm so much older than he is — quite two years.

CLINIAS

Who would believe it?

XANTIPPE

My dear! Do you know, Myrrha, he is only eighteen?

MYRRHA

Yes, I know.

XANTIPPE

You may think I'm crazy to adore this boy. But he has the brain of a man.

MYRRHA

Oh! The brain!

XANTIPPE

(With her cheek against the cheek of Clinias)

And his cheek has so delicate a beard that it feels as soft as a woman's.

CLINIAS

You make me blush.

XANTIPPE

(Rapturously)

Dearest one!

(Anxiously)

But you seem tired.

CLINIAS

You are mistaken.

XANTIPPE

No! No!

CLINIAS

(Slightly annoyed)

You are mistaken.

XANTIPPE

Don't deny it. I know that you are overtaxing yourself.

MYRRHA

What is he doing?

XANTIPPE

He is planning a great statue, and every day he spends hours and hours in his studio.

MYRRHA

Then you're no longer content to chisel jewelry for the hands of patricians and women of the town? You are not satisfied to make small delicate statuettes of your models? You want to raise a monument? To which goddess?

CLINIAS

To Voluptuousness.

MYRRHA

Another statue of Aphrodite?

CLINIAS

No, my divinity would have no religious attributes. She is to be a woman of our own time. She shall be reclining on a couch, but her figure will not show the traditional harmony. Her head will be a little too large for her body; her chest not robust, but almost girlish; shoulders slight; hips narrow, legs long. A creature not designed for maternity. Supple, agitating, useless: — modern.

MYRRHA

It's getting on?

CLINIAS

Not at all!

XANTIPPE

All day long he shuts himself up in his studio with some model. When I get there at dusk, she is still stretched upon the couch in the pose. He is pacing about, feverish, worn out with seeking. But the clay is untouched.

CLINIAS

I shall find it! I shall find it!

MYRRHA

Oh, Xantippe, how fortunate you are not to be jealous.

CLINIAS

She has no reason to be jealous.

MYRRHA

Does a woman have to have reasons to be jealous? I should suffer cruel tortures if I knew my lover were shut in with beautiful girls.

XANTIPPE

What of Art?

CLINIAS

The model is sacred to the painter and sculptor.

MYRRHA

Oh, I know all about that! When I was fourteen I was one.

CLINIAS

Oh!

MYRRHA

I can remember it still! It's amazing just how sacred the model is!

XANTIPPE

Isn't it?

MYRRHA

Yes, my dear. You would be wrong to be worried. Besides, we provoke men needlessly by displaying

our suspicions. They repulse us as soon as they perceive our weakness.

(She bursts into tears)

XANTIPPE

Why, what's the matter?

MYRRHA

I can't hide my grief from you any longer. Hippolytus is leaving me.

CLINIAS

No!

MYRRHA

We have had words. He's getting ready now to go.

XANTIPPE

But you've had a great many quarrels before this, and always such sweet reconciliations.

MYRRHA

This time, it's all ended!

CLINIAS

I've often heard that expression. But it never is ended.

MYRRHA

He gave me back his rings.

XANTIPPE

(Impressed)

Oh!

MYRRHA

The rings consecrated by our love! He threw them brutally there on the table! Look!

CLINIAS

They are not here!

MYRRHA

Perhaps Leucoé carried them away!

XANTIPPE

Perhaps Hippolytus was ashamed of his sacrilegious act, and timidly picked them up again when you were not looking.

CLINIAS

Don't be alarmed. He took the rings. He loves them.

XANTIPPE

And he loves you.

MYRRHA

Oh, what will become of me if he leaves me?

XANTIPPE

You love him?

MYRRHA

Yes! And he's here with me almost all the time. I'm never alone. If I could only get him back!

XANTIPPE

Try.

MYRRHA

How?

XANTIPPE

Arouse his jealousy. To leave the house he has to pass through here?

MYRRHA

Yes.

XANTIPPE

He must find you in the arms of Clinias. His anger will revive his sleeping affection.

MYRRHA

You think so?

XANTIPPE

Within a few minutes, Myrrha, you will see Hippolytus on his knees.

MYRRHA

Oh, if you only are right! — But will Clinias consent to play such a part?

CLINIAS

I'll do anything I can to bring back happiness to you.

XANTIPPE

To make the scene look real, I had better not stay in the house.

MYRRHA

Where will you go?

XANTIPPE

To see your neighbor, Timor.

MYRRHA

What can you have in common with that coarse fellow who spouts orations before new statues in the city?

XANTIPPE

I want to get him interested in the work of Clinias and induce him to raise funds and secure a site for the statue to Voluptuousness. A woman's smile can work wonders with magistrates and men of affairs.

CLINIAS

(Pressing her close to him)

Xantippe, darling!

XANTIPPE

Love of mine! For a little while, Myrrha. And may the Goddess of Love protect you!

MYRRHA

May ingenious Hermes second your efforts!

(Clinias throws a kiss to Xantippe as she pauses in the doorway. She blows a kiss to him, then goes out.)

MYRRHA

She is charming.

CLINIAS

Isn't she?

MYRRHA

And what a lesson she gave me! She doesn't watch over her lover with annoying strictness. She isn't jealous.

CLINIAS

She has absolute confidence in my tenderness.

MYRRHA

Aren't you ashamed when you deceive her?

CLINIAS

I'm faithful to her.

MYRRHA

You lie very well. You lie like a woman.

CLINIAS

Myrrha, I swear to you—

MYRRHA

But you often select indiscreet creatures. They tell how you treat them in your studio.

CLINIAS

They're boasting.

MYRRHA

Are you really a constant lover?

CLINIAS

Can you doubt it? Don't you know that I love only my dear Xantippe?

MYRRHA

I might believe you if I hadn't heard the most precise details —

CLINIAS

False confidences!

MYRRHA

But most flattering for such a youth.

CLINIAS

You interest me.

MYRRHA

One of my friends — Glycera — tells me that you —

CLINIAS

What?

MYRRHA

It's not easy to say.

CLINIAS

Just repeat her words.

MYRRHA

Oh, no! Don't offend my blushes. I can only sum up in a word all she told me. If I can believe her, you have — excellent manners. Is that so?

CLINIAS

A man can't be a good judge in his own case.

MYRRHA

You admit then that Glycera —

CLINIAS

No, Myrrha. But if a woman wants to compromise herself, I am willing to help her. Glycera is not and has never been anything to me.

MYRRHA

You are discreet — that's a professional virtue.

CLINIAS

Oh, Myrrha!

MYRRHA

You are offended because I compare you with such women? You are wounded because I think of you together?

CLINIAS

(He approaches the couch where Myrrha is reclining)

No!

MYRRHA

What are you doing?

CLINIAS

Just coming closer —

MYRRHA

But —

CLINIAS

But shouldn't I be near you if we want to make Hippolytus jealous enough to love you again?

MYRRHA

That's true.

CLINIAS

Allow me to put my arms around you.

MYRRHA

Oh!

CLINIAS

What?

MYRRHA

I didn't believe your embrace could be so strong.
Don't hold me so tight.

CLINIAS

Is that better?

MYRRHA

Yes.

CLINIAS

You're quite comfortable?

MYRRHA

Quite.

CLINIAS

Then all we have to do is wait?

MYRRHA

What can he be doing?

CLINIAS

Getting his belongings.

MYRRHA

He didn't have many clothes when he came here.
Only what was needed for the night.

CLINIAS

Nothing?

MYRRHA

Almost. And some palms and crowns.

CLINIAS

His glory! He must be wrapping those up very carefully. Don't be astonished at that.

MYRRHA

But Leucoé is there to help him.

CLINIAS

That will take all the longer.

MYRRHA

You think so?

CLINIAS

Well, she's pretty.

MYRRHA

Oh, a servant.

CLINIAS

A servant was my first love. It isn't often that a man enters the palace of love by the main door. He usually enters through the kitchen.

MYRRHA

You're not ashamed of your lowly initiation?

CLINIAS

No; I knew the servitors of the temple before being

favored by the devotees and the priestesses. That's the logical sequence.

MYRRHA

Then the Priestesses of Eros are — ?

CLINIAS

Yes. Those, and the dancers, and even the fashionable and rich women raised by the power of gold above the ordinary virtues.

MYRRHA

And the devotees?

CLINIAS

The devotees of Eros are the scrupulous and yielding matrons, the frightened but disturbed spinsters —

MYRRHA

Do you prefer the great crowd of the devotees to the élite of the priestesses?

CLINIAS

I love the priestesses with their ritualistic ceremonies. I prefer them religious.

MYRRHA

You child!

CLINIAS

But my arm's going to sleep, and Hippolytus hasn't come yet. Let me move it a little while we're waiting. Let my head rest on you.

MYRRHA

But — if you please —

CLINIAS

Don't you want to arouse his jealousy?

MYRRHA

Yes!

CLINIAS

Let me at least feel on my brow the freshness of your hands.

MYRRHA

No!

CLINIAS

(He caresses one of her hands)

How soft your hand is! Every morning the slave comes to care for it so that it will be sweet to kiss, and accomplished to caress. I like the delicacy of your fingers with their firm pink nails. You must scratch well.

MYRRHA

How do you know?

CLINIAS

I guess it. I can tell it from looking at your hands.

MYRRHA

Are you a palmist who can read our character and the future in the lines of our hands?

Clinias

No, that science may do for men who never have the chance to caress women's hands. I am content to judge from the form.

Myrrha

And what is your conclusion?

Clinias

You are ardent, Myrrha.

Myrrha

All Byzantium knows that!

Clinias

You lose only love. You search for it fervently. Yet you have never felt it.

Myrrha

Really?

Clinias

You yearn for unending delights. Hippolytus has given you only a few minutes.

Myrrha

What minutes, by Aphrodite! And how often!

Clinias

You can't know! You can't know!

Myrrha

Well, I'm listening.

CLINIAS

There are some things beyond words.

MYRRHA

(Caressing his brow)

Tell me.

CLINIAS

Remember, the God of Force was not loved of women. One mocked at him and forced him to spin near her wheel. Another gave him a fatal shirt. Myrrha, the sledge-hammer is not an attribute of love.

MYRRHA

You scorn the sledge-hammer because you can not wield it.

CLINIAS

The brute Samson inspired only repugnance in Delilah.

MYRRHA

They had no use for Jews. The prejudice is still strong in Byzantium.

CLINIAS

Myrrha, young Eros never crushes those chosen by his caprice. He shoots at them sharp arrows which penetrate their flesh and kill them by degrees. He gloats over their long-drawn agonies, their prolonged shuddering. The intoxication of love is not a mere accident, but a gradual, artistic torment.

MYRRHA

I always distrust people who talk too much.

CLINIAS

I know how to be silent.

MYRRHA

(Toying with his curls)

I like your hair. — Why don't you talk to me?

CLINIAS

I'm waiting.

MYRRHA

What?

CLINIAS

Hippolytus.

MYRRHA

Oh — yes!

CLINIAS

And I'm extremely uncomfortable waiting for him.
Make room for me beside you.

MYRRHA

Come!

(Clinias kneels upon the couch)

MYRRHA

Release my hands, and don't look at me like that.
What are you trying to see in my eyes?

CLINIAS

I have never seen their real color.

MYRRHA

Are you disappointed?

CLINIAS

Quite the contrary.

MYRRHA

What are my eyes like this evening? Shall I grow ugly? Where is my mirror? Get up and bring me my mirror. Dear Clinias, don't be so still. Speak! I want to hear the sound of your voice.

CLINIAS

You are afraid of the silence and its mysterious power.

MYRRHA

Clinias, I beg of you! I don't know what you are thinking about. I don't wish it.

CLINIAS

Hush!

MYRRHA

I can't see your eyes any longer! I don't wish it! I don't wish it! I am too unfortunate! You are faithless, you are perfidious! Your eyes are liars! I shall not look at you any longer!

CLINIAS

(He seizes her in his arms and kisses her on the mouth)

Well, then, close your eyes!

MYRRHA

Ah!

(Silence. Clinias finally raises his head. Myrrha looks at him, shrugs, and speaks.)

MYRRHA

Hippolytus hasn't come yet.

CLINIAS

(He leans beside her, his head on her shoulder)

Myrrha!

MYRRHA

(Feebly)

This is bad!

CLINIAS

It's good!

MYRRHA

Oh, Clinias, what potion have you made me drink? What magic power in your eyes? I feel — that I am yours!

CLINIAS

You are exaggerating!

MYRRHA

You are only a child, yet you can do with me whatever you choose. I could die for you!

CLINIAS

We shall see about that!

(Slowly she inclines towards his lips. After an interval Hippolytus enters.)

HIPPOLYTUS

(Crying out)

Oh!

MYRRHA

(Pleasantly)

Goodbye.

HIPPOLYTUS

I'm not going.

MYRRHA

But you are going!

HIPPOLYTUS

I'm not going until I tell you that you are the worst of creatures.

CLINIAS

I beg your pardon.

HIPPOLYTUS

Shut up, you half-woman, with painted face!

MYRRHA

But—

HIPPOLYTUS

Not a word in his favor!

CLINIAS

I don't need her help to speak.

HIPPOLYTUS

I'll pull out your tongue!

CLINIAS

That would be a pity!

MYRRHA

I beg of you!

HIPPOLYTUS

You! Get out!

MYRRHA

Calm down.

HIPPOLYTUS

Get out! I can't control my anger. I see red, and I have a knife.

(He draws it)

MYRRHA

No! No!

HIPPOLYTUS

You had better disappear! Disappear!

(Myrrha, terrified, flees to her room. He raises the knife and advances towards Clinias.)

And now, my little man.

CLINIAS

Don't move! How fine looking you are!

HIPPOLYTUS

(With a threatening gesture)

Defend yourself!

CLINIAS

You could earn a great deal of money, if you would pose in the studios as the enraged gladiator or the maddened lover.

HIPPOLYTUS

Your jests are out of tune.

CLINIAS

You also.

HIPPOLYTUS

I'm thirsty for your blood!

CLINIAS

What will you do with it?

HIPPOLYTUS

We must fight.

CLINIAS

You really mean that?

HIPPOLYTUS

Get a weapon!

CLINIAS

Here's one for me.

(He seizes the scarf dropped by Myrrha)

This scarf is all I need. I shall throw it in your face as the Iberians fight bulls.

HIPPOLYTUS

Coward! Coward!

CLINIAS

(He throws the scarf)

Inhale the perfume of your darling Myrrha. It does not overpower you? You are too used to it?

HIPPOLYTUS

(Springing at him)

I'll kill you.

CLINIAS

(Avoiding him lightly)

At one time that perfume would have robbed you of your strength. Now it only irritates you. Once it conjured up the delights of love. Now it only brings back your hours of boredom.

HIPPOLYTUS

You snake!

CLINIAS

And you want to kill me, just to triumph over that? Fool. Take Myrrha again! Go back to your slavery! The scarf again!

(He throws the scarf upon him)

HIPPOLYTUS

(He seizes the scarf and ecstatically inhales the perfume)

Ah!

CLINIAS

You are happy?

HIPPOLYTUS

(Casting the scarf from him)

You are right. I am mad!

(He sinks dejectedly upon a chair)

CLINIAS

(Approaching him sympathetically)

My friend, control yourself. No woman is worthy of the sacrifice of a man.

HIPPOLYTUS

Yet you love them?

CLINIAS

They amuse me. What; just because the nerves of Myrrha were thrilled by the twilight, the glorious charioteer Hippolytus must be carried off to jail, and the young sculptor Clinias to the tomb? Absurd — even ridiculous!

HIPPOLYTUS

Pardon me. I was badly brought up. I was raised in the slums of the city among brutal men who kill each other over women.

CLINIAS

Those childhood friends of yours live on those creatures who snare on the streets lovers looking for experience. When they fight over their women, they fight for their property, their treasure, their revenue. There's some sense in that. But you, you don't need Myrrha to live on.

HIPPOLYTUS

Certainly not!

CLINIAS

She may have wheedled you into accepting some presents!

HIPPOLYTUS

That's true.

CLINIAS

They are degrading!

HIPPOLYTUS

(Pressing his hand)

Thanks.

CLINIAS

Why have you remained for so many months in this corrupted society, Hippolytus?

HIPPOLYTUS

How about yourself?

CLINIAS

But I'm not a healthy, vigorous man, like you. I am not an animal of fresh air but a dog — no, a cat which rubs against women's dresses and attracts their caresses.

HIPPOLYTUS

And you scratch, too.

CLINIAS

I am supple; I know how to lie. But you!

HIPPOLYTUS

Clinias, I misjudged you. Your pardon. I thought you despised my strength. I didn't always quite understand your remarks. I always thought you were making fun of my ignorance.

CLINIAS

I've always had a keen appreciation of your candor.

HIPPOLYTUS

Then you will come see me in the modest little house where I'm going to live with Leucoé?

CLINIAS

With Leucoé?

HIPPOLYTUS

I'm taking her with me.

CLINIAS

She has developed since she has been with Myrrha. Be careful! She will want costly clothes, jewels —

HIPPOLYTUS

I'll give them to her!

CLINIAS

Choose rather a good girl who will watch over your household and your lands, and who will be a good mother. With her you will pass peaceful days.

HIPPOLYTUS

But I want thrilling ones.

CLINIAS

Then you will have to run after the girls of luxurious homes, or those who live in temporary quarters, and whom you will have to pay. If you must have thrills, get them from the girls of the streets, from wine, from the strange fish which come from Asia. But

don't expect thrills at home. Don't be a slave to the woman who lives with you — with whom you have to live. Be master of your career. Always be faithless, to remain free.

HIPPOLÝTUS

Clinias! Clinias!

CLINIAS

I shall come to your house, and you will come to my studio. There you may find girls who will tempt you. My reputation is scandalous; so a great many women visit me; calm-faced matrons with fragile hearts in their strong bosoms, light women and dancers of the knowing look, delicate young girls of surprised eyes, whom attendants always follow, little girls whose mothers want to sell them. In my studio, all the hypocrisy of Byzantium unveils itself and radiantly displays its corruptness. I had to erect a statue to Sappho, and an altar to Ganymede. You may see beauties prostrate before the lyre of Lesbos, and if you wish, I can lead you to the cupbearer of Zeus, intoxicate you with an imitation of ambrosia.

HIPPOLYTUS

(Terrified)

Be still! Be still!

CLINIAS

(Winningly)

My friend!

HIPPOLYTUS

I don't know why I spared you.

CLINIAS

Are you crazed?

HIPPOLYTUS

(Raising his knife)

I am going to kill you, kill vice, and wash out all this wickedness in blood.

CLINIAS

(Tauntingly)

You will come!

HIPPOLYTUS

(He dashes at him, then stops suddenly)

No! One doesn't kill a girl!

CLINIAS

(Smiling provokingly)

What does one do to her?

HIPPOLYTUS

(After a second's hesitation)

He runs away from her!

(He rushes from the house)

CLINIAS

(Towards his departing figure)

Until the next time!

(He shrugs his shoulders, goes to the door of Myrrha's room, and raises the curtain)

Myrrha! You can come back. He's gone.

MYRRHA

(Fearfully)

He won't come back?

CLINIAS

No!

MYRRHA

Oh, my love, how frightened I was! He didn't harm you?

CLINIAS

Not a bit.

MYRRHA

I trembled, there in my room, at the indistinct sound of your voices. Then when I heard nothing, I thought I should go mad. I tried to rush out. I tottered!

CLINIAS

Yes, yes! You feel better now?

MYRRHA

Thanks! I feared I should see you stretched out — pale — you understand?

CLINIAS

You frighten me.

MYRRHA

I could not survive the loss of you.

CLINIAS

I know — I know it! You would rather have died for me!

MYRRHA

Don't laugh at me. I was sincere when I offered to die in your stead. But the chance came to me too unexpectedly.

CLINIAS

Nothing could be more natural.

MYRRHA

One must prepare himself for heroism. One needs time for sacrifice. You believe in my love?

CLINIAS

Why should I doubt it?

MYRRHA

You love me?

CLINIAS

Without any doubt.

MYRRHA

I need your tenderness. Now I shall be alone. Hippolytus has gone and Leucoé intends to follow. I've become attached to that girl! But pshaw — you will give me another in her place.

CLINIAS

(Disturbed)

She must stay.

MYRRHA

You hesitate to be with me so much, then?

CLINIAS

I'm only thinking that it's a reflection on you to let your slave go off with your lover. All the women will say that you were thrown over for your servant, and even the men will repeat the scandalous gossip.

MYRRHA

I know that! But shall I beg Leucoé to stay? Throw myself at the feet of a rival? And what a rival!

CLINIAS

Let me attend to it. I know how to persuade her.

MYRRHA

You won't use any persuasion except speech?

CLINIAS

Myrrha!

MYRRHA

She likes to look at you.

CLINIAS

I've noticed that.

MYRRHA

You see?

CLINIAS

That's how I expect to persuade her.

MYRRHA

You need not be too persuasive.

CLINIAS

You are unfair to me.

MYRRHA

You are so clever! Don't deny it. Just a little while ago I saw the strength of your constancy. You were so loving with Xantippe — yet — just a little later —

CLINIAS

You are so beautiful! But you yourself —

MYRRHA

Oh, that's not the same thing. I was irritated, disappointed. I needed a consoler, a supporter.

CLINIAS

Don't make excuses. We merely gather the fruits which hang so low that they tempt our epicurean desires.

MYRRHA

You are over-fond of fruit — but you surely know how to pluck it!

CLINIAS

Give me!

MYRRHA

Take!

(Xantippe enters quietly. She sees the kiss, and speaks ill-naturedly.)

XANTIPPE

Here! No! That's not fair.

MYRRHA

Xantippe!

XANTIPPE

Clinias, why did you do that?

CLINIAS

Do what?

XANTIPPE

What I saw! You were kissing Myrrha.

CLINIAS

Don't be stupid, Xantippe. It's merely a misunderstanding. Myrrha will explain it to you.

MYRRHA

No! You tell!

CLINIAS

You know I have to speak to Leucoé. I'll leave you together. For a little while, Xantippe.

(He throws a kiss to her)

Just a little while, Myrrha.

(He throws a kiss to her, then disappears)

XANTIPPE

Well, I'm listening. Now for the explanation.

MYRRHA

I have no explanation. You simply surprised us.

XANTIPPE

Then, Clinias and you —

MYRRHA

Yes.

XANTIPPE

Completely?

MYRRHA

No!

XANTIPPE

O Goddess of Love, I thank thee!

MYRRHA

What?

XANTIPPE

You must swear to me, Myrrha, that you will never be with him alone.

MYRRHA

I shall never take such an oath!

XANTIPPE

Yet you are my friend, and have often sworn to me that the lover of a friend was sacred to you.

MYRRHA

Every woman says that until her friend's lover attracts her.

XANTIPPE

I admire your effrontery.

Myrrha

And I, your calm. You should have shrieked, stormed, and threatened.

Xantippe

My voice is delicate. I don't know how to yell and raise a disturbance; but I suffer none the less.

Myrrha

If I were in your place I'd make the house shake with my cries.

Xantippe

Yes — but when I was a child I didn't cry out flowers and shells to the people.

Myrrha

No — you tended geese in the country. A peaceful pursuit!

Xantippe

Yes.

Myrrha

I should have sprung upon my rival; torn out her hair, scratched her face, and gouged out her eyes.

Xantippe

Just as you did at eighteen down in the Neptune Inn, when you bit the ear of a water rat who stole the heart of your cobbler. That's why you spent several weeks in prison.

MYRRHA

My violence is less dangerous than your calculating mildness. You have been careful to keep your girlish voice and childlike eyes. Who would ever suspect that you were the mistress and the accomplice of those two negroes — both brutal fighters and murderous cut-throats?

XANTIPPE

So you follow your impulses? You don't know how to dissemble? But you never debauched the young Nearchus so he would leave you his property when he died so prematurely?

MYRRHA

How about old Menelaus who called you his daughter, and whom you piously trundled about in his wheelchair until he died?

XANTIPPE

You lie! You lie!

MYRRHA

Don't tell me I lie, you poisoner!

XANTIPPE

Vampire who sucks men's blood!

MYRRHA

Baggage of murderers!

XANTIPPE

Prison scum!

MYRRHA

Public scourge!

XANTIPPE

Pestilence!

(Menacing Myrrha, Xantippe stumbles and falls into her arms)

MYRRHA

Did you hurt yourself?

XANTIPPE

(Still in Myrrha's arms)

No! It was only a false step.

MYRRHA

You are so goodlooking! Why are you so bad-tempered?

XANTIPPE

Just a flash of anger! Why did you take Clinias away from me?

MYRRHA

I didn't do it purposely. You see I didn't even lock the door. You brought us together by arranging that scene to bring Hippolytus back to me.

XANTIPPE

You have a new perfume?

MYRRHA

Yes. You like it?

XANTIPPE

Now I know what affected Clinias. Did you think it was your beauty that did it?

MYRRHA

He's not the kind to deceive himself.

XANTIPPE

He's charming, isn't he? And then — you will see —

MYRRHA

Do you think he will be faithful to us?

XANTIPPE

No! But we'll pretend not to see his escapades. We mustn't make any complaints to him, we mustn't even appear to suffer from his inconstancy. He worries so over the sadness he causes. We shall love him for his gaiety, his ardor, his enthusiasm.

MYRRHA

For his youth.

XANTIPPE

We must try to keep him from getting old.

MYRRHA

I admire you, Xantippe, and I like you.

Xantippe

I've liked you for a long time, Myrrha, but while Hippolytus was here, I didn't dare tell you.

(Clinias enters)

Clinias

Well?

Xantippe

Myrrha has explained everything to me, Clinias, and I must apologize for my outburst of bad-temper. But I had had a rather long discussion with Timor.

Clinias

He refuses me a site for my statue?

Xantippe

He ended by promising one, and he will even deliver an oration before it.

Clinias

Oh, Xantippe! Xantippe, my own!

Myrrha

Accept my congratulations, Clinias. Tonight we shall drain the goblets in honor of your masterpiece.

Clinias

Are we going to dine here?

Myrrha

There will even be a dancer to brighten your eyes. Leucoé must oversee the preparations for the feast.

CLINIAS

She has been very much wrought up over the events of today. She has gone to bed and begs your permission to remain there until tomorrow.

MYRRHA

(Furious)

In bed! In bed!

XANTIPPE

(In a low voice)

Myrrha!

CLINIAS

But she no longer thinks of following Hippolytus. She will stay here.

XANTIPPE

Bravo, Clinias.

MYRRHA

Thanks.

(Slowly all three move towards Myrrha's chamber, Clinias embracing the two women. They pass into the room. Just as Clinias is about to enter, the dancer comes in. She is sparsely clad. A few draperies display her form. Snakes entwine about her arms and crown her head. Clinias stops, moved by the spectacle, and he listens to her sing as she dances.)

THE DANCER

I languish all the day in yearning for the night
And sighing stretch my arms to lead my lover on.

I feel that he will come to me, when day has taken flight,
To be with me till dawn.
He will put his arms about me like these serpents which I own
And I charm with my voice to Pan's sweet flute tone.

(As she continues to dance, Clinias, more moved, murmurs)

CLINIAS

What is your name, O Dancer, of the clear eyes? I love your body, supple and lithe for love. How caressingly you offer yourself! Like a wild thing, you recoil! Are you not knowing and intensifying delight? You are like a Fury. Serpents writhe in your hair, they gleam along your flesh, rear their heads from your breast, swing in ecstasy beside your limbs. They mount, they stretch out like desire, they menace, they sting. They fall. You are sad. Has your cruel kiss killed? Are you cruel to the man you stir? Your perfume intoxicates me! Unknown dancer, you are the passing close embrace! You are the power which sweeps me on — and thus you lead all men. You are impulse, thrill, forgetfulness. Will you take me, O Dancer?

(The Dancer is half exhausted. Clinias leans towards her lips. The voices of Myrrha and Xantippe come from the adjoining room.)

MYRRHA AND XANTIPPE

(Calling)

Clinias! Clinias!

CLINIAS

Coming!

(But the Dancer moves towards the outer door stretching out her arms to Clinias)

CLINIAS

(Drawn by the Dancer, he murmurs)

Coming! Coming!

(And he goes out with the Dancer)

CURTAIN

Beauty and the Beast

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

THE BEAST

MANSOUR
rich merchant, seventy

OPAL
his oldest daughter, twenty-two

RUBY
his second daughter, twenty

TURQUOISE
his third daughter, seventeen

THE FAIRY OF TOLERANCE

VIOLET
slave, sixteen

ROCK
young financier, twenty-five

YEROUM
young poet, twenty-two

The oriental palace of Mansour
The garden of the Beast

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

FANTASY IN TWO ACTS

ACT I

A ROOM in the palace of Mansour. When the curtain rises Opal comes from her chamber at the left. She takes a few steps into the room, then returns to the door.

OPAL

You must go, Yeroum.

YEROUM

(Entering)

Already?

OPAL

The sun is up. Already the laborers are going to work. The fishermen's boats are coming back to the harbor, and some of them are riding gently at anchor.

YEROUM

Through the curtains of your room I saw a pale glow, but I thought it was the light of the moon. The nocturnal bird —

OPAL

Why not say, simply, the nightingale!

YEROUM

And just now the nightingale was trilling its passion to the stars.

OPAL

It has been stilled, Yeroum, for three or four hours now.

YEROUM

Could it have been the lark?

OPAL

Why?

YEROUM

It must have been either the nightingale or the lark. Since you doubt it, you can't love me any longer. For two people smitten with each other, there are only two flying birds — the nightingale and the lark. How can I have displeased you?

OPAL

You have not displeased me.

YEROUM

I feel that your sentiments have changed.

OPAL

But no! no!

YEROUM

You no longer have for me that ardent solicitude which your unhappy husband used to wonder at.

OPAL

(Sighing)

Poor Hassan!

YEROUM

You regret him?

OPAL

That would be too strong.

YEROUM

What? You do not regret him?

OPAL

You exaggerate. Hassan was a thick, prosaic merchant. Beside his rather corpulent maturity, I appreciated your graceful adolescence. He did not shine in the difficult art of composing subtle phrases and offering them to me like bouquets of harmonious delicacies. Your beautiful voice and your palms charmed me.

YEROUM

Last night, when finally you received me in your room, you intended to accord some merit to the strophes by which I tried to express my passion? Do you want to hear them again?

OPAL

No, thank you. I fear to weary you.

YEROUM

It is true that today I must recite at the house of the Cadi's wife.

OPAL

She is interested in literature?

YEROUM

She writes, as do all women favored by fortune. They all try to depict the delights and cruelties of love.

OPAL

Yeroum! How chaste our city has become! Women describe love when they might be experiencing it!

YEROUM

Is it really you who speak so, Opal?

OPAL

I'm joking.

YEROUM

You, whose soul is so pale, cold, and deep, like the stone whose name you bear.

OPAL

The opal has mysterious reflections like a secret flame.

YEROUM

Hush! Hush, I beg! You must not express such common feelings. You are curious only about bizarre

shades, rare perfumes, chosen words, spiritual caresses. Tell me that you have not changed — that you are still the same.

OPAL

Calm yourself, Yeroum. It was merely a test.

YEROUM

(Tottering)

You frightened me.

OPAL

(Handing him a phial)

Inhale this odor.

YEROUM

It is because I adore you.

OPAL

Yes.

YEROUM

For me, you are not woman.

OPAL

I know it.

YEROUM

You are a creature almost divine.

OPAL

That's too much.

YEROUM

No! No! You are the creature to inspire me to immortal poems, to encourage my dreams. Give me your hands.

OPAL

Take them.

YEROUM

Sink back. Let me kneel beside you. Let my head, wearied with dreams, repose beneath your fingers. Their freshness is sweet upon my fevered brow.

OPAL

Oh, to feel your trembling thought beneath my caresses! It mounts along my arm, it envelopes me, it overcomes me!

YEROUM

My friend!

OPAL

I nurse you like a child, but I am thrilled as by a man.

YEROUM

Am I not a man?

OPAL

A man would not remain so quiet and motionless. He would press me to him. I should be crushed by his strength.

YEROUM

Have no fear!

OPAL

He would seek my lips — and bite me, perhaps.

YEROUM

The brute!

OPAL

He would have no respect for these light draperies. He would tear away such frail obstacles. He would snatch off my clothes and my body would appear like a brilliant star when the clouds vanish.

YEROUM

You are trembling.

OPAL

I shudder when I think what could happen if you were an ordinary man. But you are a refined youth, and all night you have been with me without so much as trying to kiss my mouth.

YEROUM

Yes!

OPAL

You grow red?

YEROUM

I do not deserve your esteem.

OPAL

How?

YEROUM

I must confess —

OPAL

Well?

YEROUM

I was not entirely insensible to base desires.

OPAL

Speak!

YEROUM

I had repeated my stanzas on the union of minds and you were quiet.

OPAL

Yes.

YEROUM

I gazed upon you. Your eyes were closed. Never had your eyelashes seemed so long and caressing. You breathed less easily. You were slightly disturbed. A curl swept across your cheek. I leaned down, and furtively, I kissed your neck. You sighed — but did not waken.

OPAL

I was not asleep.

YEROUM

You were not asleep?

OPAL

No!

YEROUM

Now I know why this morning you refuse me your tenderness. You are provoked because I broke the pact of purity which binds us. You must pardon me, Opal. It was only a childlike caress —

OPAL

No. It was the breath of a lover which passed over my flesh.

YEROUM

You will be considerate of me?

OPAL

You are unworthy of my goodness.

YEROUM

Yet you received me last night in your apartment?

OPAL

To do what?

YEROUM

Your indifference drives me to despair.

OPAL

Go!

YEROUM

I shall return soon to implore your pardon.

OPAL

Leave me. Go back to your own home. In the street look at the passerby who smiles on the women he meets. In the gardens observe the birds mating, the flowers that lean towards one another. Observe and comprehend.

YEROUM

I know that Opal and Yeroum should be above men, animals, and plants. I know that we two were born to taste superior joys. I shall follow the lesson which you so delicately give to one who has so igno-

rantly offended you. I shall attain to that absolute perfection towards which I strive.

OPAL

Oh, no! no!

YEROUM

You will be proud of me, my friend. Goodbye!

OPAL

Goodbye.

YEROUM

Goodbye.

OPAL

Goodbye.

(Opal follows his departing form with her eyes, then moves towards her chamber.)

OPAL

Hassan may have been a prosaic merchant — but he was vigorous.

(As soon as Opal has disappeared, Ruby and Rock appear at the door on the right. Ruby is decked with jewels.)

ROCK

Goodbye.

RUBY

You are going so soon?

ROCK

It's late. My servant must have gone into my work room twice. He must have been astounded not to find me.

RUBY

You prefer to my beauty your slavish work! What pleasure can you find in such vain excitement?

ROCK

Do not blaspheme!

RUBY

Really, when it happens that I have to pass before the great house of your financiers I always wonder why you gesticulate and cry out below the serene arches. When I was a little girl I thought it was a gathering of crazy people and I used to shrink at their vociferations and congested faces.

ROCK

But now you're grown up.

RUBY

And now I know that my childish presentiments were right. You are a crowd of madmen.

ROCK

Every man becomes tainted with madness when some passion seizes him. Can any passion be more fascinating than gambling? My parents piled up a few heaps of gold, and I could live in utter idleness.

RUBY

Wouldn't you like, my dear friend, to live with me in a palace built after my ideas?

ROCK

That would be a radiant place. The walls would be of fine tiling, white as your skin, and the roof of pure gold, like your hair.

RUBY

In the gardens, beneath the shadows of the drooping trees, lakes would reflect the limpid sky to recall the color of my eyes.

ROCK

Through the clumps of red roses cascades would make a joyous sound, and I should think of your laughter and your mouth.

RUBY

And in the undulating curves of the rooms you would see the tempting suppleness of my arms.

ROCK

But an imperious vocation snatches me from these luxuries. I must ceaselessly risk my fortune. I go through daily struggles. Soldiers are exposed to death; I am exposed to ruin. Tomorrow — perhaps — I shall be poor. So, furiously, I stake the enormous riches which chance has given me.

RUBY

You are attracted by all pleasures.

ROCK

I enjoy only one — luxuriousness.

RUBY

Nevertheless, I know of several women in whom you have been interested.

ROCK

You are mistaken. I have never loved.

RUBY

That's what every man tells the woman he wants to conquer. Soon you will tell me you never loved anyone except me.

ROCK

Oh, my very dear friend, I do not love you.

RUBY

Insolent!

ROCK

Certainly, you are beautiful and your expression is not severe. There are women who are noble and pure as goddesses before whom one can do nothing but kneel.

RUBY

That's a beginning.

ROCK

But you do not inspire religious sentiments. You are a fruit which tempts the teeth.

RUBY

Well, then — bite.

ROCK

Those who really appreciate the sumptuousness of a bunch of grapes would not wish to break off a single one.

RUBY

But why did you plead with me to receive you this night in my apartments?

ROCK

To adorn you with these necklaces, these bracelets, these rings. I have given myself a marvelous treat. The tyrant who burns a city at night to see the flames is a sot. An incomparable spectacle was reserved for me, for I have gazed upon the fires of jewels, the languishing of pearls, the glints of precious materials, and the dazzlingness of your youth.

RUBY

You have no respect for me, and you treat me like a courtesan.

ROCK

If I regarded you as a courtesan would I be going away without having kissed even your fingers?

RUBY

(Extending her hand)

Kiss them!

ROCK

If you were no more to me than a child of love, would I have respected you so scrupulously?

RUBY

I thank you for your delicacy. Yet perhaps in every woman there is a little sleeping spark of the courtesan.

ROCK

Will you consent to appear beside me in a litter of brocade carried by eight agile slaves? Will you pass along the alley of the acacias? Will you offer the spectacle of our union to the idlers who philosophize every morning in the promenade consecrated to virtue? Will you come with me to the games of the circus, and while you lean over the railing of my box, will you let me stoop so close that my breath shall fan your neck?

RUBY

I could accept all these conditions without outraging any of the fashionable conventions.

ROCK

And if I desire you madly?

RUBY

Perhaps — I should not be insensible to your fervor.

ROCK

My friend!

RUBY

I love a man who struggles valiantly for the conquest of wealth, and who is ready to pour at my feet the

spoils of his enemies. I feel a savage pride in realizing that these jewels are due to the ruin of several families, that these diamonds are the tears of a crowd.

ROCK

Ah! you understand me.

RUBY

If you wish, you may come back here again at night. Softly I shall open the door of the street to you and lead you to my apartment. You will take my hand, and I shall guide you along the darkened stairways.

ROCK

No! I must enter your house in full daylight.

RUBY

Then we must find an unknown dwelling. I shall go there secretly and wait for you.

ROCK

I don't wish to hide myself. I want all the city to know of my passion. I want all the women to envy your luxuries and all the men to be jealous of my happiness.

RUBY

True love seeks seclusion and mystery.

ROCK

My joy must be displayed boldly. Victory should not

be as slinking as defeat. Triumph is a public ceremony.

RUBY

My friend —

ROCK

I would cry to everyone that I possess the most beautiful woman of the city —

RUBY

Just as you have the most spirited horses, the most robust slaves, the rarest gardens?

ROCK

Yes. And if you love me you would be pleased at my naïve pride.

RUBY

It is merely an unusual vanity.

ROCK

Come out upon this terrace so that all the city may look upon your beauty and my riches.

RUBY

I think you must be mad! You forget that I am a virtuous woman.

ROCK

Farewell then!

RUBY

Don't you blush at merely suggesting such a thing to me? Am I a slave, a flute player, a dancer?

ROCK

A woman may be provoked at a man who tries to give her a coin; but how can she be vexed at one who offers her his fortune?

RUBY

I am not for sale. You shall take back your jewels. I am only wanted to wear them for a few hours to be more beautiful and so please you.

ROCK

They could not improve your beauty. But keep them.

RUBY

You forget to whom you are speaking.

ROCK

Don't insult me by returning them. If they are too heavy, take some off. Toss to the beggars these rubies, pearls, sapphires, diamonds. Let a rain of precious stones fall before your door today. Pretty girls and old matrons will run to fight each other before your house and you will be amused at their grimaces.

RUBY

Shall I not see you again?

ROCK

I shall come back soon, and you can tell me how you have distributed your jewels. You can describe to me the ecstasies of the poor.

RUBY

Yes.

ROCK

These fragments of stars will fall into rude hands. These necklaces will be destroyed. But the hungry will eat and the thirsty drink today. I leave in your hands these alms destined for the entire city. But you are at liberty not to distribute them.

RUBY

For what do you take me?

ROCK

For a little time, then, Ruby. You are beautiful as life.

RUBY

Oh, why are you so vainglorious?

ROCK

I am a conqueror. I am rough. I am not subtle like the poet Yeroum who sighs before your sister.

RUBY

My friend, take back your jewels.

ROCK

This property of the poor belongs not to me. I am a financier, not a philanthropist. Goodbye.

(He goes out)

RUBY

(She looks at herself in a long mirror)

It is cruel that I may not keep these pearls and other stones which make me so beautiful. Really, I am an agreeable spectacle. I can understand the constancy of that young Greek who leaned over the pool to contemplate his own image.

(Opal enters)

OPAL

Good morning, sister more radiant than the sun and fresher than the rose.

RUBY

Greetings to you, sister more stirring than the night and more mysterious than orchids.

OPAL

Did you pass a pleasant night? I see that the rich young man who adores you has decked you like an idol.

RUBY

He has been pleased to see upon my arms, my neck, my bosom, the power of his wealth. For him I am a divinity.

OPAL

Fortune! The goddess who balances herself on a wheel. One can offer her only prudent caresses.

RUBY

I was upon my bed.

OPAL

Poor Ruby!

RUBY

At least the young poet Yeroum was more happily sacrilegious? Did he have the good taste not to respect his Muse too much?

OPAL

Ah!

RUBY

Then you have as little reason as I to be pleased with this summer night?

OPAL

Oh, how hard it is to be happy, sister. How selfish men are! They say they adore us, yet they think of nothing but their art, their occupation, their ambition. We consented to receive two amiable lovers—

RUBY

What a trial to be a widow at twenty!

OPAL

Never have I felt myself so much a widow as this morning! But how calm you are!

RUBY

The coldness of these diamonds has reduced my ardor.

OPAL

Ruby, Ruby, while the pretty faced little Yeroum was sighing softly beside me, I could see in the

moonlight the wooded hillsides. And I dreamed of the robust vagabonds who sleep out under the trees, the rude woodcutters with the great strong hands.

RUBY

You make me blush.

OPAL

Don't you understand me?

RUBY

My soul is more simple than yours. I could never dream of sinking as low as the brutes.

OPAL

There's no reason for despising the brutes.

RUBY

At least, have some regard for the surroundings, sister.

OPAL

Could there be more beautiful surrounding for love than the forest?

RUBY

We should be careful of outdoors. The poets who have celebrated the softness of a couch of turf are the dupes of their imaginations. Love needs secrecy and luxury. The shady woods could never equal a room.

(Turquoise enters brusquely)

Turquoise

Sisters! Our father is back! From my terrace I saw his ships coming towards the port.

Opal

Aren't you mistaken, Turquoise?

Turquoise

No! No! I recognized the vessel with the reflections of an opal, the one red as ruby, and the one blue as turquoise. Before coming to tell you I watched for a long time the little fleet gliding toward the shore. See! See! Already people are running toward the waterfront to welcome our beloved father, Mansour, the rich merchant.

Ruby

Perhaps he is bringing back from some distant land a husband worthy to please you, Turquoise.

Opal

You have always disdained the young men of this city. But you will be won by the golden beauty of a little man born in the oriental islands, or by the black harmony of a noble African.

Turquoise

Don't laugh at me, my sisters. Is it such a shameful thing not to have known love?

RUBY

You are seventeen, and your coldness disconcerts public opinion.

TURQUOISE

Please don't scold me today. Let me rejoice with you at the return of our father.

OPAL

He has been away a year.

RUBY

His voyage seems to have been fortunate. His ships are brilliant.

TURQUOISE

The sails have the sheen of silk.

RUBY

There are rich carpets on the deck.

OPAL

The opal vessel has already cast anchor.

TURQUOISE

It is faster than the others. Father is on that. Soon we shall see his venerable face.

RUBY

He seems to be the god of time and I feel an almost religious respect for his long white beard.

OPAL

He's a vigorous old man. He had passed fifty when he married our mother.

TURQUOISE

She was quite young, but he survived her.

OPAL

He has remained faithful to the memory of her death.

RUBY

I hear the cries of the slaves in the court.

TURQUOISE

Our venerable father is mounting the steps.

OPAL

Here he is — the sweet, grave, solemn old man.

(Mansour enters. He has a little trimmed red beard. He is elegant, and happy.)

MANSOUR

Greetings, my daughters!

OPAL, RUBY, TURQUOISE

(Crying out.)

Ah!

MANSOUR

Don't you recognize your father?

OPAL

Pardon us —

MANSOUR

You find me changed?

RUBY

Yes.

MANSOUR

Aged, perhaps?

TURQUOISE

Quite the contrary.

MANSOUR

Troubles, my daughters, worries. Kiss your father.

RUBY

(Kissing him)

Have you lost any of your wealth?

MANSOUR

Reassure yourself, Ruby. I have gained considerable sums, and I have brought you the necklace I promised you.

OPAL

(Kissing him)

Did you spend the long months in sad, ugly lands? And have you brought back that melancholy malady our wise men term neurasthenia?

MANSOUR

I have not been bored, Opal. I have visited marvelous lands, and I found for you the rare perfumes which make you dream.

Turquoise

(Kissing him)

Why do you sigh so often, then? Aren't you rejoiced to see your daughters again?

Mansour

Can you doubt my affection? Can't you see how sweet it is for me to hold you in my arms?

Opal

But why these sighs?

Mansour

Because I am no longer young, my children.

Ruby

Yet you seem strong and your beard has some color again.

Mansour

Precisely! Precisely! I am so old that I had to rejuvenate myself. Oh, my children, you must know that I can not walk about the streets and gardens without leaning on the arm of a companion. Isn't that saddening?

Turquoise

It is easy for you to buy a young slave.

Mansour

That's just what I did. I assure you that such a support to old age is indispensable for me.

OPAL

Nothing could be more natural.

MANSOUR

I did not want the presence of the newcomer to trouble the outpouring of family affection. But I beg you to prepare a hearty welcome.

RUBY

Do we usually mistreat our servants?

TURQUOISE

Isn't our regard due to the hand which supports our father?

MANSOUR

This hand is beautiful, and you must, all three of you, render homage to the charm of the face.

OPAL

Let us see this wonderful servant.

(Mansour makes a sign and Violet enters)

MANSOUR

Behold!

OPAL

But this is a woman!

MANSOUR

Did I say it was a man?

RUBY

Now I understand your embarrassment.

Mansour

I was afraid of your ill-humor.

Opal

You didn't expect to impose on us the presence of a slave who has the appearance of a mistress?

Mansour

Oh, my children! Don't be in too great haste to judge the conduct of your venerable father. While you are crying out, Violet remains silent.

Turquoise

Her name is Violet?

Mansour

Yes, my child. While you are irritating yourselves, she is smiling. Talk with her; dismiss your evil thoughts. I shall go down into the court to find among the baggage the coffer containing the presents I promised you. When I come back my hands will be laden with gifts. You will kiss me, and pardon me for having offered to my old age such a delicious little gift.

Turquoise

Father, let me go with you. Don't you need some support?

Violet

Why, master, are you so exhausted?

MANSOUR

Indeed, no!

TURQUOISE

Well, then. If I may not be your support, you may be mine; let me put my hand upon your arm, as the western women do.

(Mansour and Turquoise go out)

OPAL

Oh, our father is in a lamentable state!

VIOLET

He declares every day that he has never been so joyous. I must admit to you that my awakening has been bitter. I hoped his daughters would be less ungrateful to me and that they would recognize the efficacy of my attentions.

RUBY

We owe you our thanks?

VIOLET

Of course.

OPAL

You don't see that thanks to you or father has become ridiculous?

VIOLET

What difference does that make? He's happy!

RUBY

He dyes his beard!

VIOLET

He has the illusion of youth.

OPAL

Beside you, he tries to straighten his body, bowed by years!

VIOLET

Don't you admire such an effort against decrepitude?

RUBY

He has false teeth!

VIOLET

They make his smile more agreeable. For he does smile. He used to be morose; now he is gay. He used to be stingy; now he's almost extravagant.

RUBY

Heavens!

OPAL

What did you do to transform him so?

VIOLET

I showed him myself.

RUBY

You danced and sang for his pleasure?

VIOLET

He noticed me among other slaves in a market of Tunis, an African city. Oh, my sisters—

RUBY

We are not your sisters—

VIOLET

Oh, my daughters — for if I desire it, I can become your mother.

OPAL

Insolent!

VIOLET

So, Ruby, and you, Opal, do you believe that to win the heart of a man we must have recourse to ruse, to perfidy, to stratagems? Our victories are never due to such tactics, but to chance.

OPAL

Nevertheless, you know how to soften your looks and your eyes become so tender that they would charm me if I didn't have the power to protect myself against their dangerous seductiveness.

VIOLET

The mildness of my eyes is natural, and I am making no effort to please you.

RUBY

You are not speaking the truth. Slave dealers and old women have taught you this assumed ingenuousness.

VIOLET

I am too indolent to force myself to such an effort — to learn how to lie.

OPAL

Yet you talk well. You were in school long?

VIOLET

Until my fourteenth year.

RUBY

Tell us your story. I know it already. Your parents were rich; then suddenly they became poor. That's it, isn't it?

VIOLET

You are right.

OPAL

But weren't you the daughter of a valiant warrior who was slain by the enemies of our sovereign?

VIOLET

No.

OPAL

What, you're not the child of an officer?

VIOLET

My father was a merchant who died young and left me without any fortune.

RUBY

And you intended, naturally, to give the young citizens lessons on the harp?

VIOLET

Never! I knew such work earned little pay. My mother, who abandoned us soon to run off with a musician, had made me beautiful. So I soon made up my mind to sell myself.

OPAL

No!

VIOLET

What would you have done in my place?

OPAL

I would have struggled!

RUBY

Any woman can earn her daily bread.

VIOLET

Of all the professions women follow, I felt an aptitude only for loving.

OPAL

How indecent!

VIOLET

At first I sought out an old man who had seen my father born. He showed me a great deal of kindness.

RUBY

We did not ask you for details!

VIOLET

I have no intention of giving them to you. You need merely know that if I had not deceived him with his

steward, he would never have sold me to the horrid dealer who took me to Africa.

Opal

Poor little thing!

Violet

If I had been more faithful, more icy, or more prudent, I might have been the wife of this honorable property owner. But he was as proud as all white haired lovers. He could not forgive my loving a young man — one of his servants.

Ruby

Poor father! And such a creature can charm you!

Violet

Yes, indeed. It was at Tunis, at the market. There were only negresses. My soul may be spotted; but my body is pure white. That's why your father noticed me.

Opal

We shall reveal your past to him.

Violet

He knows it better than you do. He even knows that I was not indifferent to the threats of the slave dealer who liked me.

Ruby

What! You ceded to the supplications of such an individual?

VIOLET

He didn't beg me; he beat me. It is easy to resist a pleading voice, but not a striking cudgel.

OPAL

I would rather die than submit to his caresses!

VIOLET

Well! Life is pleasant. I hoped it would bring me a better future, and I was right. Besides I was able to forget the slave dealer with a companion in captivity.

RUBY

Aren't you ashamed?

VIOLET

No, he was a fine fellow. He was a brute, but sincere. He could not hide his passion, so the slave dealer had his eyes gouged out.

OPAL

Horrors!

VIOLET

This dealer gave me a striking proof of his love! He sacrificed for me some of his own merchandise. And now my poor lover turns like a blind horse around a well and raises water. But he has not forgotten me, and my image consoles him for his hard lot.

RUBY

You — girl!

Violet

Yes. I am not married.

Opal

We shall drive you from our home. You soil its purity.

Violet

Only the gods are immaculate, and perhaps their reputation is exaggerated.

Ruby

Have you no morality, no religion?

Violet

I was thrown suddenly into wretchedness. Such a plunge often breaks one's conscience, which is a luxurious and fragile trifle.

Ruby

We shall save our father from your influence.

Violet

It wouldn't surprise me.

Opal

Then you will fall back into the mire from which he raised you.

Violet

Please! Have pity on my distress. If, some day, I am rich, I shall have principles. I promise you!

RUBY

Away from here! Miserable, away from here!

(The Fairy appears)

THE FAIRY

Don't drive her away, Ruby. She is a woman.

RUBY

Are you some sorcerer who protects this creature?

THE FAIRY

I am a fairy.

OPAL

A fairy!

VIOLET

You see, at least, that I have some pretty relatives.

THE FAIRY

Look at me. I am not ugly as the magicians who at night mix criminal potions. My face is as bright as day.

OPAL

I must admit that your face is attractive. But if you are really a fairy, you should uphold justice, and should let us drive this creature away.

THE FAIRY

You don't know much about fairies; we are, on the contrary, the enemies of justice. We flutter around the cradles and at caprice distribute upon the new-born either vice or virtue, stupidity or intelligence,

weakness or strength, obscurity or glory. We disturb universal order. We are the adversaries of the equitable power which organized the world.

OPAL

What are you saying?

THE FAIRY

If we had not attacked the regular order, all men would be equal — and perfect.

RUBY

But why weren't all of you destroyed?

THE FAIRY

Because without our intervention, life would be a bore. Our injustices give some zest to living. If we didn't stir up rivalries, combats, humanity would have gone to sleep long ago.

OPAL

Then you will protect Violet against our just resentment?

THE FAIRY

And I shall prevent you from doing an evil act which would hurt your father, Mansour.

VIOLET

You love him?

THE FAIRY

He has been extremely unfortunate. His wife, much younger than he, did not love him.

RUBY

You are not going to insult our mother?

THE FAIRY

What power can force a creature to experience certain sentiments? We have no defense against our sympathies and our hatreds. The wife who did not cherish Mansour was not criminal, but he suffered, and now it is time that fate should be kind to him.

OPAL

Who are you, then?

THE FAIRY

I am the most precious of fairies. I have not the power to upset heaven and earth, I can not unloose the elements; I carry no armor against the redoubtable gods, and I am not as bare as the naked truth. My transparent veils let my form be seen without causing offense. I am discreet Kindness. I am the Fairy of Tolerance.

VIOLET

Merciful One, do not turn aside from your humble servant!

THE FAIRY

I love you, Violet, because you have always been tolerant of human passions.

RUBY

And you hate us because we are closely attached to virtue?

THE FAIRY

Ruby, Ruby, you have not yet given to the poor the jewels with which the violent generosity of Rock, the financier, has ornamented you.

RUBY

But — I have not yet had the opportunity.

THE FAIRY

Before the door of your dwelling a wretched crowd awaits the alms from your father to celebrate his return.

RUBY

Well?

THE FAIRY

Throw the diamonds, the pearls, the sapphires to these poor.

OPAL

Why give such treasures to these dirty persons who will only sell them to get drunk?

THE FAIRY

Opal! You blame their coarse drunkenness, yet you seek rare and strange sensations. You are like those who stagger after drinking. Your intoxication is distinguished. That's the only difference! Be indulgent to excuse your own actions.

RUBY

It is true, Violet, that I should not blame your desire for a luxurious and indolent life.

OPAL

The sympathy inspired by your companion in captivity, Violet, has stirred me. I understand you.

THE FAIRY

Oh, if only all women would listen to my counsel, if they would discard the vicious custom of living in hostility, if they would only agree, existence would be so agreeable for them.

VIOLET

We are listening to you, O Fairy, so benevolent and immoral.

RUBY

Speak! What must we do?

OPAL

We shall obey you.

THE FAIRY

Embrace one another.

(Mansour and Turquoise enter. He sees the three embracing.)

MANSOUR

Now, may the gods be blessed! Peace has returned to this house!

OPAL

Give thanks — not to all the gods — but to the Fairy of Tolerance.

TURQUOISE

A fairy!

MANSOUR

What! You a fairy! Quick, sherbets and sweetmeats! We can not do enough honor to one who brings light and joy to our home.

TURQUOISE

But do fairies eat sherbets and sweetmeats?

OPAL

They are immaterial.

(Violet has gone to get the sweetmeats and sherbets)

RUBY

They drink up sun rays.

THE FAIRY

Yet these pink sweetmeats tempt me.

RUBY

Are you insensible to the fresh smell of sherbets?

THE FAIRY

(Tasting the sweetmeats)

It's most delightful not to be merely an ideal creature, most delightful!

OPAL

Yes, isn't it?

THE FAIRY

Tasting these I can easily understand how the gods often succumbed to earthly temptations.

MANSOUR

Nevertheless, immortal nourishment—

THE FAIRY

They are as tasteless, my dear Mansour, as ethereal kisses. Oh, Turquoise, Ruby, Violet, Opal, how fortunate you are to be women!

TURQUOISE

Why?

THE FAIRY

Your sisters, who have known the delights of love, do not ask such a question. Little Turquoise, the happiness of humanity is that it is divine in spirit and animal in body. Man is more complete than any god, since he experiences the joys of both intelligence and flesh.

VIOLET

Some more sweetmeats?

THE FAIRY

Yes! Yes! And if I weren't afraid of seeming vulgar to you, I could bite into a piece of black bread.

MANSOUR

We can easily give you that pleasure.

THE FAIRY

No! I must keep my figure.

RUBY

But, why?

THE FAIRY

I am the Fairy of Tolerance, not of Exposure.

OPAL

So much the worse!

TURQUOISE

But, dear father —

MANSOUR

What?

TURQUOISE

Your astonishment at finding a fairy here has made you forget —

MANSOUR

Well?

TURQUOISE

Forget the gifts you should offer my sisters. They are in that casket.

MANSOUR

It is true that my mind was a little disturbed. You will allow me, kind Fairy, to give these modest presents to my daughters?

THE FAIRY

I would not disturb your family joys.

MANSOUR

Here, Ruby, is a necklace of pearls pink as the blood of a languishing young maiden.

RUBY

I am overwhelmed at such a marvelous gift.

MANSOUR

Accept it without blushes. Your beauty deserves it.

RUBY

But you are giving me a fortune.

MANSOUR

That is true. But I assure you I secured this jewel in exchange for a few slips of paper.

THE FAIRY

What supernatural power let you perform such a miracle?

MANSOUR

The Genius of Finance.

THE FAIRY

I do not know him.

MANSOUR

I shall present him to you. He is a spirit of extraordinary power. He induces people to give up their riches for paper marked with little figures. He says to the crowd: "Soon this paper will be worth a great

deal." They believe him, for public credulity is immense. That's why we are so rich.

TURQUOISE

Oh, venerable father!

MANSOUR

In this precious phial, my dear Opal, is a mysterious essence which will give you enchanted dreams. An old crone sold it to me, and I tried its power at once. I had only to inhale this magic mixture, and I slept deliciously for an entire week, and had the most extraordinary delights.

THE FAIRY

Mansour, didn't you buy two bottles?

MANSOUR

Unfortunately, no, Fairy. A father can not repeat all the details to his daughters. But I can affirm that you will have reason to thank me.

OPAL

Trust in my gratitude, father, wise among the wise.

TURQUOISE

And for me?

MANSOUR

You?

TURQUOISE

I asked you to bring me a flower.

MANSOUR

I don't remember that.

TURQUOISE

Oh, I can see you are only teasing me. You want me to get excited. You didn't forget the wish of your youngest child.

MANSOUR

I assure you, my child—

TURQUOISE

There, in the casket, I saw it.

MANSOUR

What, then?

TURQUOISE

A rose!

(Mansour opens the casket, and takes out the flower)

TURQUOISE

Oh! What a beautiful rose!

OPAL

Beautifully white, with a heart as pink as a furtive desire.

RUBY

It looks like some precious tissue.

VIOLET

A rose more beautiful than all other roses.

THE FAIRY

Without doubt, gathered in some enchanted garden.

TURQUOISE

Give it to me, father! I want to smell it!

MANSOUR

You must not touch it until you know where it comes from.

TURQUOISE

What difference does that make if it charms me!

MANSOUR

You are my own child. That's exactly what I thought when I first saw Violet.

TURQUOISE

Father, father, let me have the flower.

MANSOUR

It opened, gloriously, in a royal park.

RUBY

Where is it?

MANSOUR

In a city. I do not know. I do not know how I came to be in the garden walk bordered by fragrant shrubs. I was alone. My people were resting at the inn, and I had become lost while walking. Suddenly I saw this rose. I did not resist the desire to pluck it to bring to you.

OPAL

The flower is quite fresh. You picked it this morning?

MANSOUR

More than six months ago.

TURQUOISE

How?

MANSOUR

And every morning it seems younger. Drops of dew tremble in the mysterious folds of its corolla.

THE FAIRY

Unbelievable!

MANSOUR

It is strange that you do not believe in miracles—you, a fairy!

THE FAIRY

Excuse me, but I always doubt any supernatural thing unless I have caused it myself.

RUBY

A flower which does not wither! What a rarity! Give me the rose, Turquoise, and I'll give you the best of my necklaces.

MANSOUR

Oh, my children! Don't covet a gift that may prove dangerous. Just as I had plucked this rose, I saw emerging from a bush a monstrous creature.

OPAL

What was he like?

MANSOUR

He had — like a man — two hands and two feet. But he was as hairy as a bear.

TURQUOISE

A kind of monkey?

MANSOUR

No! He spoke in a rough voice, but in good language.

OPAL

He must have had an interesting face.

MANSOUR

I remember only the sadness of his eyes.

RUBY

And then?

MANSOUR

And then, I was afraid, for he uttered threats. He said, "Miserable stranger, since you have dared to pull that rose, I shall strangle you!"

THE FAIRY

What did you do?

MANSOUR

I prostrated myself before him.

VIOLET

You did right. We must always honor those who threaten us and appear stronger than we are.

MANSOUR

Tremblingly I said, "Sir, I plucked this rose for my daughter, Turquoise. See, a father kneels at your feet." And he said, "I am a beast and have no sentiment of family. But — is Turquoise beautiful?" I held out to him your picture which I always wear on my long voyages.

TURQUOISE

Oh! But that's such a poor picture of me!

MANSOUR

He was touched by the charm of your face and he said, "I shall pardon you because you are the father of this maiden. But you must tell this adventure to her. You will offer the rose to her, adding that if she inhales its perfume she will be immediately transported to this garden. Go! and may I see your daughter soon!"

OPAL

Splendid!

RUBY

I must admit I'm skeptical still. It was some vagabond, father, making game of you.

Mansour

This vagabond wore on his finger an incomparable emerald.

Ruby

In size?

Mansour

And in color; a stone as mysterious as the ocean and as hope.

Turquoise

Give me the rose.

Mansour

Reflect, my child, of the risks you run if you smell it.

Turquoise

I want it! I want it!

Ruby

You are young, Turquoise. You have not yet experienced the supreme joys of life. Let your older sister take your place and undergo the trials intended for you. Let me depart to the enchanted garden and when I get back, I'll tell you everything that has happened.

Turquoise

I'm tired of stories. I'm always being told about things! I want to know for myself. Give me the rose!

OPAL

Are you going to give yourself to a beast when well-educated young men sue for your hand? You will have no defense against the attacks of this brute. Let my experience meet this assault.

TURQUOISE

My rose! My rose!

MANSOUR

You — Fairy — come to our aid and turn my daughter from this madness.

THE FAIRY

You are an old man, and yet you pretend that you can recognize wisdom and clemency? Your daughter, in obeying her caprice, in following her instinct, perhaps sees more clearly than you with your reason and your prudence.

MANSOUR

Ungrateful, you wish to leave your father's house?

TURQUOISE

I can smell already the perfume of the enchanted garden.

MANSOUR

You have no regret at leaving your old father who thinks only of your happiness?

TURQUOISE

I hear the voice of my beloved.

MANSOUR

My child! My child!

VIOLET

You need not be present at her departure.

MANSOUR

You are right. Such fruitless emotions are a drain on my health.

VIOLET

Come smoke in the little room with the soothing walls which you have so often described to me. And I shall sing to lighten your pain.

MANSOUR

Farewell, my child. Kiss me! Watch over her, good Fairy. Goodbye, you ungrateful child whom I adore!

(He goes out accompanied by Violet)

THE FAIRY

She is no more ungrateful than your other children. She is merely obeying the natural law.

RUBY

We stay with our father!

OPAL

We don't run after silly adventures.

TURQUOISE

Sisters mine, would you like to have the rose?

RUBY

What are you saying, dear?

OPAL

You really consent?

TURQUOISE

No! Let me attempt my own fate. My moment to live has come. I was only testing you.

RUBY

Goodbye.

OPAL

May you be happy.

(Ruby and Opal move out of the room)

TURQUOISE

Fairy, I must confess I am afraid.

THE FAIRY

You can still refrain from smelling the rose.

TURQUOISE

But what would the others say?

THE FAIRY

If you want to be happy you must take no thought of public opinion.

TURQUOISE

I am afraid — I am afraid — but it is delicious.

(She ventures to smell the rose; her voice becomes more feeble; she grows drowsy.)

Fairy, it seems to me I am already in the enchanted garden. The beast is approaching. Oh! What anguish! But how pleasant!

THE FAIRY

Young maiden! Young maiden!

TURQUOISE

Fairy, do you fear this beast?

THE FAIRY

My child, I have no reason to fear him.

TURQUOISE

Fairy, he is not wicked. I am caressing him, and he does not want to harm me.

THE FAIRY

Dream on! Dream on!

TURQUOISE

Fairy, could it be that the beauty might love the Beast?

THE FAIRY

Quite possible!

TURQUOISE

Fairy, who will transport me to the garden of beautiful roses?

THE FAIRY

The swiftest of couriers — Light and the Seven Colors.

TURQUOISE

Goodnight — goodnight — Fairy.

(She is asleep. The Fairy makes a sign. Light and the Seven Colors appear and dance the Ballet of Light.)

CURTAIN

ACT II

The garden of the Beast. When the curtain rises Turquoise is lying as at the end of the first act. Near her stands the Fairy.

THE FAIRY

Now you may awaken.

TURQUOISE

(Opening her eyes)

I ought to say, "Where am I?"

THE FAIRY

That's what everyone says who wakens in an unknown place.

TURQUOISE

But I recognize these flowers and these trees although I've never seen them. I am in the enchanted garden.

THE FAIRY

The dwelling place of the Beast.

TURQUOISE

How this beautiful place reassures me! A monster who delights in these flowers can not be so terrible.

THE FAIRY

Wisdom warns us not to judge people by appearances. Clothes do not make the man.

TURQUOISE

You mustn't pin too much faith to proverbs. People who are deceived by attitudes, gestures, and appearances simply don't know how to look.

THE FAIRY

Presumptuous!

TURQUOISE

A man's house betrays to us his tastes and his inclinations. I need no more than these beautiful vistas ending in round plats of green and basins of singing water. I am no longer afraid. The creature who lives here is a fine animal.

THE FAIRY

But if he is cruel?

TURQUOISE

The delicate tints of the baskets prove his tenderness.

THE FAIRY

If he is brutal?

TURQUOISE

How can you say such a thing when you see these fine and carefully leveled gravel paths where he walks? I begin to fear that this brute has a commonplace soul. Without doubt I shall find on the lawn a glass globe.

The Fairy

Which reflects his ugliness?

Turquoise

He is not ugly.

The Fairy

Why not?

Turquoise

Those vases with supple outlines prove to me that he loves beauty and his eyes will show it.

The Fairy

You are mad!

Turquoise

Let us explore this domain so that I can divine all the qualities of the person who waits for me.

The Fairy

Let us walk in the woods.

Turquoise

While the wolf is not there.

The Fairy

You know the story of Little Red Riding Hood?

Turquoise

That doesn't frighten me. Little Red Riding Hood was too young to satisfy the wolf's hunger. He wouldn't have eaten me. I am Little Blue Riding Hood.

THE FAIRY

You have confidence in your destiny?

TURQUOISE

I have faith in my turquoise star. Psyche was sent to meet a furious monster and she met — love. I am like the princess who adored a lion.

THE FAIRY

You are going to file his teeth and trim his claws?

TURQUOISE

No! It is degrading to weaken those who love us. I know of nothing more base than what that coquette did. She didn't deserve to have a lion love her. She was fit for only a fox or a dog.

THE FAIRY

Come, Turquoise. Let us walk in the woods.

TURQUOISE

But I see people in the woods.

THE FAIRY

Those are the men who sigh for your sisters.

TURQUOISE

The financier Rock and the poet Yeroum?

THE FAIRY

They followed them.

TURQUOISE

Are my sisters here too?

THE FAIRY

When you fell asleep you dropt the magic rose. They inhaled the odor. Rock and Yeroum then bore the flower to their nostrils. Violet and your father could not resist their curiosity.

TURQUOISE

Then it's a family reunion!

THE FAIRY

Aren't you glad to feel your sisters so close to you?

TURQUOISE

And my almost — brothers-in-law!

THE FAIRY

And your venerable father?

TURQUOISE

And his respectable slave!

THE FAIRY

Their host had them transported in a little pavilion.

TURQUOISE

And what hospitality does he offer me?

THE FAIRY

For you a palace of blue before which a terrace sown with mauve irises overlooks a garden of forget-me-nots, violets, and pansies.

TURQUOISE

Is this a blue land?

THE FAIRY

It is the domain of Turquoise. Come.

TURQUOISE

Not towards Rock and Yeroum. I have need of solitude and meditation.

THE FAIRY

Shall I leave you?

TURQUOISE

When you are near me, I am with myself. You are neither a relative nor a stranger: — you are my soul.

THE FAIRY

(Singing)

Let us walk within the woods.

TURQUOISE

(Singing)

When the wolf's no longer there.

(They move away, but their voices can still be heard)

THE FAIRY

If the wolf should meet you.

TURQUOISE

He would surely eat you.

THE FAIRY

But he's gone away.

Turquoise

So no meal today.

(As soon as they have disappeared the Beast emerges from a thicket. He listens to the lessening song.)

The Beast

I could weep at the sound of her voice. While she spoke, I gazed upon her. But I could not see her distinctly. Why didn't I go up to her? Why didn't I throw myself at her feet? I feared I might terrify her. She would have been frightened by my ugliness. She would have uttered a cry I could never forget. Oh, I would quit this hideous and grotesque wrapping! Just for a moment to be a man and appear to her without arousing her horror! What divinity cursed my birth? Why am I hateful or ridiculous? I haven't even the relief of shedding tears! Oh, why am I not a man, even though infirm, crippled, disfigured! Then I should know at least the relief of tears!

(He sinks down. Despair overcomes him. Yeroum and Rock enter cautiously.)

Yeroum

We are wrong to intrude upon his meditations.

Rock

We must have a talk with this monster.

(The Beast groans)

YEROUM

(Trembling)

What ideas can we exchange with this animal? He hasn't seen us. That permits us to avoid him without appearing impolite.

ROCK

Are you a coward?

YEROUM

I haven't a soul of a martyr. Without being a coward, I must admit I'm not anxious to approach a wild beast.

THE BEAST

(Perceiving the two young men)

Are you looking for me, sirs?

ROCK

We are.

THE BEAST

Are you pleased with your quarters? Have my servants been attentive to you?

YEROUM

Oh, courteous unknown, we have nothing but praise for your household and your generosity.

ROCK

Our reception has been cordial and magnificent.

THE BEAST

Look at me.

Rock

Sir!

The Beast

Look at me, Yeroum!

Yeroum

I am.

The Beast

I am ugly, am I not?

Rock

But —

The Beast

Fastidious Yeroum, you profess to cherish the beautiful. Tell me if I am as horrible as I imagine.

Yeroum

I do not know. The question you put is an extremely delicate one.

The Beast

Answer without fear or pity.

Yeroum

Beauty is merely an appearance and a convention. We admire the head of a certain dog, yet if we saw it on the body of a man we would think it hideous. You are probably very handsome — for your kind.

The Beast

I am a monster — yet I am in love!

ROCK

You hardly know Turquoise!

THE BEAST

I love her! I love her youth! I love the intelligent clearness of her eyes! I love her delicacy and fragileness! I love her because she is a woman, and I am only a brute.

YEROUM

Just as rude Vulcan sighed for Sweet Venus and sooty Polyphemus for Galatea, white as milk.

THE BEAST

You happy men! You can be loved — yet you do not love!

YEROUM

But —

ROCK

If you please —

THE BEAST

Opal inspires your talent for riming, Yeroum; and Ruby your cleverness as financier, Rock. They are the mirrors of your abilities. In their eyes you see your own intellects. You are men. I — I am a beast. I am as straightforward as instinct.

ROCK

You are not a brute.

Yeroum

You are overstating.

Rock

You must think above all of Turquoise's happiness.

Yeroum

You will pity her tears. You want to obtain everything by appealing to tenderness.

The Beast

You are right!

Rock

My dear fellow, you are almost human.

The Beast

Is it then impossible for her to be mine? I am ugly. But often in your cities young maidens marry repugnant, rich old men. Like them, I have riches, and I am strong, I am young.

Rock

You don't understand conventionality. We admit that a girl of sixteen may marry a man nearly ninety. But your marriage with Turquoise would create a scandal. If it occurs — I must warn you — I shall renounce my desire to enter the family of Mansour. I can not live without public approval; — I am a financier.

YEROUM

I shall have to relinquish Opal, for I dare not risk being ridiculous. I am a poet.

THE BEAST

And you claim to love! To love is to care nothing for the world, for family, for one's self.

YEROUM

You speak like an old lyric poet.

ROCK

Would you really be such a beast?

THE BEAST

Oh, my beloved, I would that all the contempt of the world might overwhelm you! I should lean over your distress, raise you, and console you. I would show the crowd my claws and my fangs, and the vile horde would respect you. None would dare utter a word when you passed with me through the city.

ROCK

Who ever loved like that?

THE BEAST

I do now — the Beast.

YEROUM

My dear fellow, you don't understand women. Certainly, it's a fine thing to offer them tumultuous pas-

sion. That flatters them. They welcome the speeches which praise eternal — and above all, exclusive — love. But beware of actually imposing such a serious attachment upon them. They haven't the endurance to survive it. Their souls are as delicate as their shoulders.

ROCK

If you wish to please them, be jesting and skeptical even while you swear eternal vows. The words you utter will flatter their vanity; but your tone will reassure them.

THE BEAST

I can't believe you are speaking the truth. There are women who yearn to be loved as I wish to love. And I am waiting for one of them now.

ROCK

Well, I hope you meet such a bizarre, exceptional creature.

YEROUM

A phenomenon.

THE BEAST

A monster, you mean?

ROCK

Can you really believe that the soul affinity you seek dwells in a feminine body? Look at this approaching creature, and tell us, truthfully, whether you believe you can please her.

THE BEAST

Ah, me!

ROCK

Show yourself to my charming Ruby and if she doesn't run away from you, I'll not oppose your marriage to Turquoise.

YEROUM

Make the trial.

THE BEAST

I dare not.

ROCK

We'll hide behind this shrubbery and listen to your gallant conversation.

THE BEAST

Spare me the test.

YEROUM

(Laughing)

Oho! ho! ho!

(Rock and Yeroum disappear. The Beast looks timidly along the path toward the approaching Ruby. Then he sinks to the ground with his paw ornamented with the large emerald in view upon a stone or a hillock of turf. Ruby enters.

RUBY

Oh! What a beautiful emerald!

(She approaches and tries to pick it up)

THE BEAST

(Rising slightly and speaking softly)

Take care, Madame, of my claws. You might hurt yourself.

RUBY

(Slightly abashed)

Ah!

THE BEAST

(Standing erect)

I horrify you?

RUBY

No!

THE BEAST

But you uttered a cry.

RUBY

I didn't expect to see anyone. I leaned over this stone as if it were a flower. I tried to pluck it. If just at that moment a beautiful butterfly had flown up, I should have cried out just the same. I am not very brave. I'm afraid of bees and bugs.

THE BEAST

And you're not afraid of me?

RUBY

Of you? No!

THE BEAST

No! Yet I am a monster.

RUBY

Who? You?

THE BEAST

I!

RUBY

No!

THE BEAST

I am not a monster?

RUBY

You were speaking just now of paws and claws.

THE BEAST

See!

RUBY

These are simply powerful hands. Your rather long nails are as pink and transparent as shells.

(She takes the hand bearing the emerald)

THE BEAST

Never have I heard such pleasing speeches. The maidens about here flee when I approach.

RUBY

(Still holding his hand)

Stupid creatures!

THE BEAST

Young mothers shriek, "The Beast!" and when their children are bad, they threaten to call me and have me devour them.

RUBY

(Holding his hand still)

My poor friend!

THE BEAST

You pity me?

RUBY

I am affected by your fate. I would try to help you forget the injustice of it. I hardly know you, and yet you stir all my pity.

THE BEAST

(Disengaging his hand)

Oh! So it's merely pity?

RUBY

Sir?

THE BEAST

You offer me your pity as an alms. You pour upon me, as upon a sick man, a compassionate regard.

RUBY

(Regaining his hand)

Give me your hand. Do we go to the aid of unfortunate persons like this? Is our feeling for them so evident, so marked?

THE BEAST

You really mean that you feel some tenderness towards me?

RUBY

(Lowering her eyes)

Hush!

THE BEAST

You blush?

RUBY

You forget that you love my young sister, Turquoise.

THE BEAST

I was charmed by her portrait. I have heard the delicious sound of her voice. I have gazed upon her delicate figure. But I have not yet seen her face. I have not exchanged a word with her.

RUBY

And faithless already! Just like a man!

THE BEAST

Ruby!

RUBY

Pardon me! I didn't mean to hurt you.

THE BEAST

(Sadly)

Like a man!

RUBY

Yes; like a man. For you are not one.

THE BEAST

More's the pity!

RUBY

You are superior to mankind.

THE BEAST

What?

RUBY

I must confess to you — besides, you are so penetrating that you must have perceived it already; — being here with you I can not control myself from feeling a

sudden and deep thrill. Oh! you are not like the others!

THE BEAST

(Taking her hand)

My friend!

RUBY

How you must look down on me!

THE BEAST

No! No!

RUBY

You must know the truth, for I have need of your esteem.

THE BEAST

I do esteem you!

RUBY

You must not think that this is only a passing whim which draws me towards you. I know that you are destined to accomplish glorious deeds.

THE BEAST

You are sure?

RUBY

Until now you have lacked confidence in your powers. You have shut yourself up in seclusion. You have not made use of all the resources at your command.

THE BEAST

(Somewhat moved)

I am destined to a brilliant future?

RUBY

See! Already you are awakening! I adore your exaltation.

THE BEAST

(More irritated)

Yes, Yes! I understand. Under your benign influence I should astonish the world. The land would be dazzled by the splendor of our existence.

RUBY

(Very tenderly)

Speak on!

THE BEAST

(Furious with rage)

You know that in the rooms of my castle are accumulated riches which would astonish your eyes? A pile of gold and precious stones. A handful of this would buy all the lands — and all the consciences of the country.

RUBY

What a marvelous dream!

THE BEAST

(More violently)

The whole world would prostrate itself before us, as I might kneel before you.

RUBY

(Taking one of her necklaces and placing it upon him)

Accept this gift.

THE BEAST

Take this emerald ring which you saw first, and which drew you to my distress.

RUBY

(Taking the ring)

Oh, my love!

(Rock and Yeroum appear suddenly)

ROCK

(To Ruby)

Wretch!

RUBY

You must be mad!

YEROUM

(To Rock)

Calm yourself, my friend, calm yourself.

ROCK

I'll kill her!

YEROUM

(Restraining him)

I beg you!

RUBY

Yes; you're in a fine temper!

ROCK

Don't jest, and don't try to deceive me by your mild tone and your innocent eyes. I saw you. I heard your tender words.

RUBY

Really?

ROCK

Your behavior is infamous. You're a —

RUBY

Go on. I expected your insults! Why don't you beat me? You can find heavy branches anywhere about here in the woods. Shall I get one for you? If you want to kill me, draw the knife from your belt. And shall I hang my head under your outrages, shall I cry out under your cudgel, or bleed under your sharp blade? You forget that I may have at my side some one to protect me.

ROCK

He'd better not interfere in our quarrel!

THE BEAST

I have nothing to say. I am watching you with admiration. You gnash your teeth, you growl, you shudder — yet I am the beast.

YEROUM

I beg of you — don't irritate him!

THE BEAST

I have no intention of irritating him. He has all my sympathy.

RUBY

Oh!

ROCK

In short, sir, haven't I good cause to be jealous? I see the woman I adore —

RUBY

You adore me!

ROCK

The woman I adored. — I saw her offer you a necklace I gave to her.

THE BEAST

(Handing her the necklace)

Take it back.

RUBY

That's the way you treat my presents?

THE BEAST

There's no need for a woman to give her brother-in-law sumptuous presents.

ROCK

What?

RUBY

(Slightly vexed)

Why of course! Isn't he going to marry Turquoise?

ROCK

But — just now —

RUBY

Well! My friend, don't you understand that an honorable woman doesn't like to be spied on by the man who pretends to love her?

ROCK

Then you knew I was watching you?

YEROUM

They've played a joke on us!

RUBY

I saw you behind the azalea bushes.

ROCK

Oh, you minx!

RUBY

I fortunately found, to give you your lesson, a person clever enough to give a perfect imitation of sincerity.

ROCK

I implore pardon for my brutality.

RUBY

It showed me the unsuspected violence of your love. Go on! Insult me! Finish your sentence, "You are a—"

ROCK

You are a—

RUBY

Well? Well?

ROCK

(Kissing her hand)

You are a woman!

RUBY

Come.

(Returning)

Ah, sir, I was forgetting. Take back the ring you offered me in jest.

THE BEAST

Keep it. It is my betrothal gift to you.

RUBY

Thanks.

(Rock and Ruby, affectionately embracing, go out)

YEROUM

Allow me to congratulate you.

THE BEAST

Why?

YEROUM

You have acted like a gallant man.

THE BEAST

You alarm me.

YEROUM

You helped Ruby to lie; it was well done.

THE BEAST

She merely wished to excite the jealousy of her lover —

YEROUM

Oh, not at all! I am not so simple as Rock. I am penetrating, subtle. I understand women. Just now

when she was alone with you she meant every word she said.

THE BEAST

You claim to understand women, yet you pretend that you can tell the exact moment when one of them means what she says!

YEROUM

There are accents which can not deceive. Ruby was ready to love you.

THE BEAST

Perhaps she was attracted somewhat by my riches.

YEROUM

You want to be loved for yourself alone?

THE BEAST

Yes!

YEROUM

But, sir, women are charmed by our qualities, by the joys they can extract from them. A wrestler is adored for his strength, a poet for his imagination, a comedian for his fame, a millionaire for his money. Every one of us is cherished for some advantage to his sweetheart. Women are as selfish as we are. We must try not to be too vain.

THE BEAST

Your indulgence should be welcome to charming

Opal. She is coming this way, doubtless looking for you.

YEROUM

I don't want her to find me.

THE BEAST

Why not?

YEROUM

My hair is not well curled. The folds of my tunic are not quite right. My nails are not pink enough. I must repair my appearance.

THE BEAST

Stay here!

YEROUM

No! No! I can not risk the loss of her tenderness and my prestige by letting her see me with a belt so badly tied.

(He hurries away)

THE BEAST

(Alone)

I admire all the troubles men give themselves when they're in love. Such fastidiousness as this we mere beasts can't understand.

(Opal enters)

THE BEAST

If you are looking for Yeroum, he will return soon. He went to his pavilion to readjust his curls and arrange his costume.

OPAL

What did you do to him?

THE BEAST

Nothing.

OPAL

I thought you might have rolled him in the dirt.

THE BEAST

Oh, no. We were frankly conversing. But he was afraid he wasn't properly combed or sufficiently perfumed to approach your grace.

OPAL

Are you making fun of him?

THE BEAST

No! He is a charming young man. But I must apologize for having addressed you without being introduced.

OPAL

I am Opal.

THE BEAST

I beg you to excuse me if I do not observe all the conventions of polite society. I am not polished.

OPAL

Let me assure you I have seen no slip to shock me.

THE BEAST

You are too indulgent.

Opal

Oh, no! Just like you, I abhor conventionality.

The Beast

You have discarded all the absurd traditions?

Opal

I have an independent spirit.

The Beast

Yet you frequent social gatherings?

Opal

Simply to observe people. But in the midst of these brilliant and feverish functions, I am able to isolate myself.

The Beast

You are a superior woman.

Opal

No! No! It's simply that I have an individual personality.

The Beast

I divined it. Few men are able to comprehend your real feelings, your inmost thoughts.

Opal

I hide them under a mask of frivolity.

The Beast

You are melancholy, aren't you?

OPAL

Oh, yes!

THE BEAST

A dreamer?

OPAL

Oh!

THE BEAST

Temperamental!

OPAL

What would you have me? I am an artist.

THE BEAST

Which art? Painting?

OPAL

No!

(He looks carefully at her hands)

THE BEAST

Not sculpture?

OPAL

No!

THE BEAST

Architecture?

OPAL

No!

THE BEAST

(Striking his brow)

Music!

OPAL

Oh, about as much as all women. I can sing. But I pursue no regular art; I vibrate.

The Beast

You vibrate?

Opal

Yes. Before sunsets, in the moonlight, I vibrate. I sense the mysterious beauty of things. I become intoxicated with rays and darkness. My soul dilates.

The Beast

Then you have a soul?

Opal

Why, certainly! Haven't you?

The Beast

Oh, I? I'm a beast.

Opal

What an inconvenience not to have a soul! Then you have no sensitiveness?

The Beast

Indeed yes! I rejoice to see the beauty of the sky, to hear the songs of birds, to taste the flavor of fruits, to breathe the perfume of roses, to caress your hand.

Opal

All these are only the gross pleasures of the senses. But you do not experience the delicious troublings of the soul.

The Beast

I do not understand you.

OPAL

How can I explain to you?

THE BEAST

Try!

OPAL

Are you happy to be near me?

THE BEAST

Indeed yes.

OPAL

Why?

THE BEAST

Because I find you attractive.

OPAL

(Disdainfully)

Seeing!

THE BEAST

I like the sound of your voice.

OPAL

Hearing!

THE BEAST

The perfume of your presence is agreeable.

OPAL

Smelling!

THE BEAST

(Taking her hand)

I like to hold your hand.

OPAL

(Slightly affected)

Touching!

THE BEAST

(Responding)

The flavor of your neck is exquisite!

OPAL

(More affected)

Tasting!

THE BEAST

(Carried away)

I can anticipate more rapturous, more complete delights —

OPAL

Oh, my friend! My friend! You are going to speak of the soul!

THE BEAST

Oh! The soul, that's what that —

OPAL

(Half closing her eyes)

Why am I so happy at feeling so feeble in your strong hands? The soul!

THE BEAST

I understand.

OPAL

I should flee from you — yet I am happy at being rocked in the arms of the beast.

THE BEAST

The soul!

OPAL

The odor of your fur intoxicates me. It has kept the perfume of the grass where you have slept. A woodland odor — the freshness of thyme and lavender.

THE BEAST

The soul!

OPAL

It seems as though a faun had pursued me across the country. I could hear behind me the increasing sound of his goat feet. I felt his breath upon my neck. I had no strength to flee. Oh, monster! Monster!

THE BEAST

My dear soul!

OPAL

(Abandoning herself to him)

Can you comprehend the beauty of these supernatural superior joys?

THE BEAST

It seems to me that I also have a soul!

OPAL

Divine, isn't it? How far removed we are from the vulgar world. We are soaring!

THE BEAST

(Letting her sink down)

We are far from the earth.

OPAL

So far! So far!

(Yeroum enters. He assumes a false jocularity.)

YEROUM

Here I am.

OPAL

Ah!

THE BEAST

Yeroum!

YEROUM

Did you think I was going to shriek out like Rock? I'm not so stupid!

OPAL

What?

YEROUM

If I had discovered you in a gallant conversation, flirting, I might have taken offense. But really, you went too far.

THE BEAST

What?

YEROUM

The picture you showed me was incredible. Opal, the fastidious Opal, fainting in the arms of the beast. That's too much. It's perfectly plain that this is a practical joke.

OPAL

But Yeroum, I assure you —

YEROUM

(Serious; moved)

It must be only a practical joke, Opal. Otherwise I should suffer too keenly.

OPAL

I never knew, Yeroum, that you love me so deeply.

YEROUM

It was a test, a bitter test. Oh; I am ill; I am ill!

OPAL

I didn't intend to hurt you. I am disturbed — I am not quite sure of myself. — I did not foresee your grief.

YEROUM

Opal!

(She hesitates between the Beast and Yeroum)

YEROUM

(Moving toward the left)

Opal!

THE BEAST

He is calling you. He loves you.

YEROUM

(Almost out of sight, extending his arms)

Opal!

OPAL

(Following him)

I am coming. I am coming.

(They disappear together)

THE BEAST

It is certain that I shall be a success with the women. The peasants who run away from me must be coquettes; now I'm sure of it. They want me to run after them. Ruby and Opal are more simple, more natural. It's a fine thing to be a beast for women.

(Mansour enters)

MANSOUR

Greetings, son-in-law!

THE BEAST

Greetings.

MANSOUR

Well; have you talked with Turquoise?

THE BEAST

I have not met her yet. She is strolling about the gardens.

MANSOUR

And you haven't dared present yourself to her?

THE BEAST

Why not? Isn't my appearance all it should be?

MANSOUR

Oh, yes; yes! But I thought you might be timid.

THE BEAST

I know how to talk to women.

MANSOUR

Humph!

THE BEAST

Ruby and Opal gave me some valuable lessons, or rather they revealed to me my real nature, my commanding destiny.

MANSOUR

Ah!

THE BEAST

I am an animal of prey!

MANSOUR

Yes?

THE BEAST

I am destined to make conquests.

MANSOUR

Over what?

THE BEAST

Women!

MANSOUR

No!

THE BEAST

But I have some scruples. I'm afraid I shall be a philandering husband. I wouldn't like to make Turquoise weep — like Elvira.

MANSOUR

Elvira?

THE BEAST

The wife of Don Juan. For a little while, sir.

MANSOUR

You are going?

THE BEAST

I am going to walk and meditate. I'll see you again soon.

(He leaves. As soon as the Beast is out of sight Mansour indicates that he thinks him mad. He shrugs his shoulders, and calls.)

MANSOUR

Violet! Violet!

VIOLET

(Appearing)

My master!

MANSOUR

I'm afraid the marriage of Turquoise is broken off.

VIOLET

Well, now! She is too pretty, too young, and too rich to marry a monster.

MANSOUR

It's the monster who breaks off the marriage.

VIOLET

Wise fellow! He's sure he'll be deceived.

MANSOUR

He's a fool! He's afraid he'll be faithless! He declares he's a regular Don Juan! To tell you the truth, I fear that Ruby and Opal have persuaded him —

VIOLET

That he's handsome?

MANSOUR

That he has charms. You may succumb to his seductiveness. You haven't seen him yet?

VIOLET

Sir, I distrust that negative quality — charm. When a person is ugly, we always grant him this consoling attribute — charm.

MANSOUR

You judge women's faces severely because you are so beautiful.

VIOLET

Women who are not beautiful judge them still more severely.

MANSOUR

Oh, Violet, but you women are peculiar! It is certain that Ruby and Opal have found this beast quite to their taste. They are my own daughters, but I can not understand them.

VIOLET

They are not the least alike.

MANSOUR

Nor like me. Don't you marvel at the way young mothers reflect the influence of persons and things?

VIOLET

They do say that longing for a certain fruit can mark the body of the unborn child.

MANSOUR

And there are moral and intellectual imprints, if I may call them so. Before my daughter Ruby was born, an officer frequented our house. He talked usually of war and glory. My wife listened to his stories. Thus my daughter Ruby has the spirit of a conqueror.

VIOLET

Admirable!

MANSOUR

Before Opal was born we had a musician friend who was curious about refined pleasures. He had disquieting interests. That is why Opal seeks rare sensations.

VIOLET

But Turquoise? She is directness itself.

MANSOUR

My wife had been very ill. She was somewhat older and no longer received the homage of young men. We remained more alone together just before Turquoise was born. So she is not at all complex. She resembles me.

VIOLET

Master, you please me beyond words.

MANSOUR

I'm going off to smoke some of my fragrant tobacco, blond as her hair, before dinner. Life is sweet and we must render thanks to the gods.

VIOLET

I shall gather some flowers and arrange them in the room while you dream among the filmy blue spirals.

MANSOUR

Come soon, my little Violet.

(He disappears)

VIOLET

I shall follow you.

(Violet gathers flowers while she sings)

I have a long journey to take,
But who will accompany me?

(The Beast appears, regards her and finally speaks with a fatuous air.)

THE BEAST

Greetings, Little One!

(She turns her head, and shrieks)

Oh! The monster! The horror!

(She flees. He remains amazed. Then his astonishment changes to grief.)

THE BEAST

I've heard the truth! Woe's me! I was mad enough to forget my ugliness.

(He is overwhelmed. Turquoise enters and sinks to her knees near him.)

TURQUOISE

You are suffering?

THE BEAST

Leave me!

TURQUOISE

Why do you drive me away? I am Turquoise.

THE BEAST

I know you. You are the sister of Ruby and Opal. You are a woman.

TURQUOISE

A young girl.

THE BEAST

Go! Go!

TURQUOISE

Sir!

THE BEAST

If you want jewels or gold, my steward will lead you to my treasures. You may carry off as much as you please. My people will load your mules and slaves. Do you want these gardens, my palace, as well? You may have everything! But do not give me thanks. Do not pretend for me a regard you can not feel. Leave me — alone — in a cavern!

TURQUOISE

Sir, if you go to a cavern, there in that cavern will be my felicity.

THE BEAST

Your pure looks, your innocent voice make you more to be feared than the others.

TURQUOISE

The others?

THE BEAST

Are you ready to live with me in solitude?

TURQUOISE

Yes, my lord.

THE BEAST

But you do not know me. You are seeing me for the first time.

TURQUOISE

I have so often dreamed of you.

THE BEAST

I am brutal.

TURQUOISE

Because you are unfortunate. But, with me, you will become affectionate and mild.

THE BEAST

You believe then that you bring me happiness?

TURQUOISE

Yes — because I bring you my love.

The Beast

Love! But it's not possible that you can be telling the truth! Your blue eyes, your girlish voice — they are not honest!

Turquoise

Why do you doubt me?

The Beast

Because I know myself. Just look at me. I am a monster!

Turquoise

I see the fire of your eyes.

The Beast

My hands are not made for caresses.

Turquoise

Your glances reveal your consideration and your goodness.

The Beast

I am ugly — I am hideous.

Turquoise

I love you.

(He takes the head of Turquoise tenderly)

The Beast

Let me gaze at you and consider. Your glances are mild and your countenance is open. But perhaps your face is a mere deception.

TURQUOISE

Oh! My beloved!

THE BEAST

Ah! If I could only pierce your eyes, and look down into you! If I could rend aside all the veils which shut me out from your inmost thoughts.

TURQUOISE

There is no veil between us. I am yours, entirely.

THE BEAST

Oh, woe! I can not resist believing you!

TURQUOISE

You must believe me.

THE BEAST

Believe! Believe! Believe in a god, believe in an idea, believe in a woman; — that is the strength and the grandeur of humanity.

TURQUOISE

My love!

THE BEAST

Religions, philosophies, love — all may deceive. But who can deprive us of the joy of having believed?

TURQUOISE

Believe in me.

THE BEAST

O Turquoise! You are beautiful among the beautiful.

Turquoise

My sisters are more beautiful than I am.

The Beast

No! No! You are beautiful because you make me believe in a lasting, supernatural felicity.

Turquoise

My lord!

The Beast

O Turquoise, pure as the blue sky, pardon me; for a few seconds I doubted your sincerity.

Turquoise

But you soon perceived that I was speaking the truth.

The Beast

When your glances fell upon me, I felt that I belonged to you. It was a miracle. A superhuman power calmed my anger and swept away my defiance.

Turquoise

A fairy, perhaps? And wasn't it a fairy who gave me so suddenly the thrill of loving?

The Beast

Do you believe in fairies, Turquoise?

Turquoise

There are fairies! Do you doubt that?

THE BEAST

No! No! I believe in the supernatural because I am loved by you.

(They move out of sight, embracing. The fairy appears)

THE FAIRY

Stroll together beneath the branches which bless you! The enchanted garden trembles. The birds are stilled for the noon of the day. The ardent hour! The blossoms faint and droop from their stems beneath the too feverish kisses of the sun. Now all the perfumes rise and the rays dazzle. Oh, Turquoise, your lips implore the lips of the monster.

(Suddenly the cries of Turquoise can be heard)

TURQUOISE

(In the distance)

Horror! Horror! Horror!

(She rushes into view beyond control)

Horror!

THE FAIRY

What has happened?

(The Fairy makes a gesture, calling all the persons. They all appear, except the Beast.)

MANSOUR

My child! What is the trouble?

OPAL

Turquoise!

RUBY

My little sister.

Turquoise

Oh! Oh!

The Fairy

Speak!

Turquoise

O my good Fairy! O my father! O my sisters! And you, my brothers-in-law! And you, Violet.

Mansour

But what is it?

Turquoise

I had gone with my beloved into the shade.

Violet

With the monster?

The Fairy

Violet!

Turquoise

We were close to each other.

Opal

Oh! Turquoise!

Turquoise

I was troubled! I no longer knew what I was doing!—

Ruby

He will make reparation, my sister, reparation!

Turquoise

I don't understand.

MANSOUR

Come now! Be definite! Just what happened?

TURQUOISE

(Lowering her eyes)

I felt his kiss on my lips. I thought I was dying.

OPAL

But you recovered. What then?

TURQUOISE

Imagine my astonishment and indignation. It was no longer the monster who held me in his arms. It was a handsome young prince.

THE FAIRY

Prince Charming!

TURQUOISE

Oh! My good Fairy! How ridiculous he seemed!

THE FAIRY

Fate decreed that a kiss from a loving young maiden should change the monster to a charming young prince.

MANSOUR

What? My son-in-law is a prince?

OPAL

Are you happy, Turquoise?

RUBY

You should rejoice!

TURQUOISE

You should have warned me! Here I was smitten by an exceptional being, and all of a sudden, my fiancé becomes an ordinary distinguished young man.

VIOLET

Are you going to refuse a good looking suitor?

TURQUOISE

He seemed too handsome. He looks like Yeroum.

OPAL

Well?

YEROUM

(Who has remained at one side with Rock)

We didn't intend to take any part in this intimate family matter, but since you mention my name —

OPAL

My dear Yeroum!

RUBY

Rock, my beloved!

TURQUOISE

Yet I think my prince is not so delicate as the charming Yeroum!

(The Prince enters)

THE PRINCE

I dare not approach.

TURQUOISE

(Without looking at him)

And I dare not look at you.

MANSOUR

(In a low voice to Turquoise)

He's a fine young man!

OPAL

(In the same tone to her)

Lovely glance!

RUBY

(Also to Turquoise)

Well brought up!

VIOLET

(Following the others)

Beautiful manners!

YEROUM

(Also to Turquoise)

Quite elegant!

ROCK

(Aside to her)

Rich costume!

THE FAIRY

(To Turquoise)

He is charming!

THE PRINCE

I am happy over this extraordinary transformation because it proves to me that you loved the monster

sincerely and you regret his disappearance. But aren't you going to let me try to win you?

TURQUOISE

The being I adored exists no longer!

THE PRINCE

He still lives. I implore you, Turquoise, to look at me, to listen to me.

TURQUOISE

I do not want to look at you. I do not want to listen to you.

THE PRINCE

Yet you are listening to me.

(He draws near)

I love you, Turquoise, and you will be my wife. I love you.

TURQUOISE

(Moving away)

Leave me!

THE PRINCE

(Detaining her)

No! No! You must remain here! All these minutes I have been forcing myself to act as my costume requires. You must remain!

TURQUOISE

(Drawing away)

I wish to leave.

THE PRINCE

You must remain!

TURQUOISE

(Looking at him)

Ah!

THE PRINCE

(Rather brusquely)

You will remain!

TURQUOISE

I recognize the fire of your eyes! Ah! You are right.
The Beast is not dead.

THE PRINCE

(Kissing her)

Turquoise!

VIOLET

The sincerest homage to nature is this. —
That the adventure should end with a kiss.

ROCK

This tale with its monster so frightful to see
Will fascinate children in years yet to be.

YEROUM

And how just one kiss can a man metamorphose
Will be the theme of oceans of verse and bad prose.

MANSOUR

The latest ages all will sound
My reputation, sense profound.

My glory spread to worship, since
I have for son-in-law, a Prince!

Turquoise

O father wise, why should people hoard
Their glory — if they've been adored?

The Prince

The happy lover who still tries
To make the world acclaim some feat,
Is like a rich man who has all —
Yet covets still a grain of wheat.

The Fairy

The moral of this story true —

Violet

Listen close! 'Tis meant for you!

The Fairy

To win, you lovers, what you prize
Use more than speeches, vows, and sighs.
Zeus who to swan and bull could turn
Knew very well why women yearn.

Opal

(Dreamily)

But he was slightly — too — too — rude!

Ruby

He was also the golden shower
And thus o'er Danaë won his power.

OPAL

I was dreaming of another case.
As a lover, Zeus was no romanticist.
He knew our feminine souls — a psychologist!

VIOLET

(To the audience)

So, sirs, use all your strongest arts
To win our shrinking, timid hearts.

THE FAIRY

Imitate the great divinity,
Resort to mild brutality.

OPAL

(Leaning toward Yeroum)

Know, even the proudest seeming mind,
To usual love may be inclined.

TURQUOISE

(Putting her mouth up to the Prince)

This single truth I know, at least,
My sincere kiss I give you — Beast!

CURTAIN

The Slippers of Aphrodite

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

APHRODITE

THE ACTRESS

MINERVA

NYMPH OF THE WAVES

THE YOUTH

THE RUDE FAUN

THE ELEGANT FAUN

THE OLD MAN

DANCERS

A forest beside the sea. Phoenicia. Long ago.

THE SLIPPERS OF APHRODITE

FANTASY IN ONE ACT

FOLLOWED BY A BALLET

When the curtain rises, Aphrodite is reclining upon a couch of roses. The Nymph of the Waves approaches her.

NYMPH

Aphrodite of the white arms, you must waken!

(Aphrodite does not move)

You must waken, Aphrodite!

(Aphrodite stretches herself, but does not answer)

Aphrodite, you must waken!

APHRODITE

(Sighing)

Ah! Ah! Ah!

NYMPH

She sighs so tenderly! It must be a dream! How beautiful she is!

(She kneels beside the couch and kisses her hands)

APHRODITE

(In a feeble voice)

Ah! It is you! It is you!

NYMPH

Yes!

APHRODITE

(In the same tone, embracing the Nymph)

It is you! It is really you!

(She wakens, starts up, rubs her eyes)

But no! It is not you!

NYMPH

How?

APHRODITE

O daughter of the waves, excuse my mistake. A dream caused it. Did I squeeze you too tight?

NYMPH

Yes!

APHRODITE

I beg your pardon.

NYMPH

You did not hurt me.

APHRODITE

Thus the divinity of night abuses our spirit!

NYMPH

(Sighing)

Yes!

APHRODITE

You dream sometimes?

NYMPH

Like all goddesses and demi-goddesses.

APHRODITE

That's true! You are a demi-goddess!

NYMPH

That's enough for me.

APHRODITE

I understand you. I wanted so much to belong to the demi-monde of the immortals.

NYMPH

We must admit that our situation is agreeable. We are as close to the men as to the gods.

APHRODITE

The happy medium! The superior goddesses soar about the serenity of the snowy crest — Mount Olympus.

NYMPH

It must be cold there.

APHRODITE

(Shuddering)

Ah!

NYMPH

Do you wish not to leave your bed of roses?

APHRODITE

Yes, I must. What time is it?

NYMPH

The sun has been up some ten hours.

APHRODITE

How late I have slept! The moonlight was so troubling.

(The Nymph rearranges her hair)

I have never been able to understand why Diana, the chaste goddess, rules over the night.

NYMPH

The powers of night are so dangerous, Aphrodite, that the purity of Diana is necessary to control them. If she did not oppose the seduction of the darkness, what would happen?

APHRODITE

It is true that if I ruled over the universe after the setting of the sun —

NYMPH

Quite true!

APHRODITE

But it makes no difference! It seems to me that Diana is not so cold as they say. For she did stoop to the lips of Endymion.

NYMPH

But she arose again immediately.

APHRODITE

Useless precaution!

NYMPH

You think she should have persisted in her fault?

APHRODITE

Little nymph, when we commit a fault, we should at least enjoy it at leisure. I am going to take my bath.

NYMPH

In the pool of pink rocks the water is warmed by the sun's rays.

APHRODITE

The day will be warm.

NYMPH

But what will you say to me, Aphrodite?

APHRODITE

What?

NYMPH

Will you give me today the answer to the question you allowed me to ask you?

APHRODITE

Which question?

NYMPH

You are teasing me. Every day I ask you whether you will remain here with us long—

APHRODITE

And if I am forever banished from the dwellings of the gods.

NYMPH

Oh! I do not even know whether you are banished or if you are merely spending a short time in Phoenicia to amuse yourself.

APHRODITE

Well—yes—I have been banished.

NYMPH

Oh!—Why?

APHRODITE

It's a family matter.

NYMPH

Ah!—then?

APHRODITE

That is all.—You are disappointed?

NYMPH

A little.

APHRODITE

You hoped to hear a tragic story?

NYMPH

I had hoped for definite details.

APHRODITE

Let us go to the bath.

(Just as they move off, two young fauns appear. They have armfuls of flowers. The Elegant Faun bears roses, lilies, etc. The Rude Faun bears wild flowers.)

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Do not go away. We have been waiting for you to waken.

APHRODITE

Go, little nymph.

(The Nymph goes out)

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Ever since dawn we have skipped about the countryside, and we even stole into the gardens of the Phoenicians to bring you these roses, these lilies —

THE RUDE FAUN

And these flowers whose names we don't know — but which are just as beautiful.

APHRODITE

My thanks.

(She stretches out her hand. The Elegant Faun bows over it and kisses it. The Rude Faun stares at her without even moving his head.)

APHRODITE

(To the Rude Faun)

You do not wish to kiss my hand?

THE RUDE FAUN

Why should I kiss it? Why give me your hand if you don't intend to give me your arms, your shoulders — and all the rest?

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Pardon the rudeness of my brother, Beautiful Unknown. He resisted all attempts to educate him. He doesn't know how to address women.

APHRODITE

But you — you know?

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Surely! I received lessons from an amiable philosopher who came here to live in this forest. He was smitten with the desire for solitude. He disdained glory — which besides had never smiled upon him.

APHRODITE

Where is he?

THE ELEGANT FAUN

His uncouth manners drew public attention. So he returned to the world where he now enjoys a fruitful celebrity.

APHRODITE

Didn't he try to reform your brother as well?

THE RUDE FAUN

I couldn't listen to his worn-out remarks. When he opened his mouth, I yawned. I felt an overmastering

desire to skip off through the woods, to roll in the grass, to climb trees. Like my brothers the monkeys I used to go to sleep in the swaying branches.

Aphrodite

I love your musical voice and your ardent eyes.

The Rude Faun

Don't talk that way to me. Don't flatter me if you intend not to love me.

Aphrodite

Child!

The Elegant Faun

We are quite young, but we adore you.

Aphrodite

You do not even know me.

The Rude Faun

We've seen you here in the woods these past three days.

The Elegant Faun

I have thought of nothing but you these three days.

Aphrodite

(To Rude Faun)

And you, you have thought only of me?

The Rude Faun

No!

APHRODITE

What?

THE RUDE FAUN

I have thought of the air which is so sweet to drink in, of the fruits which I can gather, of the warm blue waves in which I plunge. But besides these — I thought of you.

APHRODITE

To you I am nothing more than a possibility of pleasure?

THE RUDE FAUN

I never had lessons from a philosopher. Why should you be for me a possibility of grief?

THE ELEGANT FAUN

My brother, be still! You do not know how to speak to women!

THE RUDE FAUN

Should I tell them they are going to make me suffer?

APHRODITE

Such a promise never displeases them. You can even add that you will die if they are cruel.

THE RUDE FAUN

They wouldn't be so gullible. They would mock such extravagant declarations.

APHRODITE

At first they would smile — if they have pretty teeth. Then they would grow serious to say to themselves, "The poor boy. He is really sincere. Who knows? Perhaps?" They would look at themselves in a mirror, count over their intellectual and moral qualities and arrive at this conclusion, "Very likely, without me, he will not be able to endure existence."

THE RUDE FAUN

If you are telling the truth, Beautiful Unknown, women are fools.

APHRODITE

No! But like men, they are all vain.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

You mean, a just pride.

APHRODITE

Pride! Vanity! The difference is slight. Vanity is a little bit of pride, and pride is only great vanity.

THE RUDE FAUN

Now you are saying something wise. Yet you look like a woman. Who are you?

APHRODITE

Guess.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Judging by the scantiness of your costumes and the

beauty of your poses, I should say you are not a strict person.

APHRODITE

Child! Do you think that virtuous women dress differently from their rivals? We are not in prehistoric times.

THE RUDE FAUN

The deluge washed the earth.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Yes! I am certain of it. You are a great courtesan.

APHRODITE

Perhaps.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

You are not shocked at such a supposition?

APHRODITE

You know as well as I do that chaste wives and irreproachable mothers blush with pride if a passerby or a stranger takes them for hetairæ trained in the practices of Corinth.

(To the Rude Faun)

And you, do you think I am one?

THE RUDE FAUN

I don't see why I should rack my brain trying to find out what you are. Women always want us to guess their thoughts, their sentiments, their needs. We must talk about them, analyze them. What differ-

ence does it make? You please me. If I should meet you in the depths of the forest and were strong enough, I should master you — oh, in spite of yourself, doubtless — in spite of yourself, at first.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

You do not know how to talk to women!

APHRODITE

Indeed, he talks quite well.

(The Nymph enters)

NYMPH

Mistress —

APHRODITE

(Annoyed)

What is it?

NYMPH

The bath.

APHRODITE

The bath?

NYMPH

The spectators are growing impatient. The dryads with pensive eyes and the mocking fauns are waiting for the daily spectacle you provide.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

(Offering his hand)

Allow me to accompany you.

THE RUDE FAUN

Come along!

APHRODITE

You are too young.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Bah!

APHRODITE

Beautiful young girls are not for such youths. What would be left for the old men?

NYMPH

For my part, I love young men.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Ah!

THE RUDE FAUN

You do?

NYMPH

(Between the two fauns)

I do not love old men.

APHRODITE

Well?

NYMPH

What is it?

APHRODITE

It is time for my bath.

NYMPH

(Sighing)

I follow you, mistress.

(Aphrodite and the Nymph go out)

The Rude Faun

The little maid is fetching.

The Elegant Faun

Yes. But the mistress is mocking us. To win her, I was gallant and you were rude — and all in vain.

The Rude Faun

Eh? Didn't I play my rôle well? I was brutal, insolent.

The Elegant Faun

Your speech was a little too flowery.

The Rude Faun

Well, I was as uncultivated as a cultivated person can be. And all I got from her was an indulgent glance!

The Elegant Faun

Do you want my opinion, brother?

The Rude Faun

Even if I don't want it, you'll express it just the same. So without any hesitation I say, "Yes, brother, I should like to hear your opinion."

The Elegant Faun

Well, then; she is as cold as ice.

The Rude Faun

The woman who doesn't accede to our fervor always appears cold. If she doesn't love us it's always be-

cause she has no feelings. If she ceases to cherish us, it's because she's vicious. We always attribute our repulses to the defects of the adversary. In this way our vanity is not wounded, and that's the only thing that matters.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Yet she has peculiar eyes —

THE RUDE FAUN

The little maid is fetching.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

You can love a servant?

THE RUDE FAUN

More violently than a queen or a goddess.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

There are times when you inspire in me a deep contempt.

THE RUDE FAUN

Yes. The times when I say something true.

(He raises his flute and plays a few measures)

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Oh! I beg of you!

THE RUDE FAUN

You don't care for music?

(He plays again)

The Elegant Faun

Not yours. Its simplicity annoys me.

The Rude Faun

You would rather have discords? I never saw a faun who was so much of a snob.

(He continues to play. Minerva appears.)

Minerva

At last! Here are living creatures.

(The fauns prostrate themselves)

The Fauns

Minerva! It is Minerva!

Minerva

Rise! But how did you recognize me? This traveling tunic should have preserved my incognito.

The Rude Faun

But your shield.

The Elegant Faun

And your spear!

The Rude Faun

And the bird of night upon your brow.

Minerva

How difficult it is to hide our divine nature! We need only appear and men are seized by a religious fervor. From us there emanates a fluid —

THE RUDE FAUN

But, great Minerva, we really saw your symbols, your accessories.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

It was not that! I knelt because I admire your eyes, like the waves, so blue and green, so clear and troubled.

MINERVA

You are a wise man. Receive my shield. Receive my spear.

(The Elegant Faun takes the shield and spear, and almost sinks under their weight)

THE ELEGANT FAUN

My thanks.

MINERVA

In this manner we honor the faithful.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

You are too good!

MINERVA

Moreover I authorize you to place these arms upon the ground.

(The Faun carries them to one side)

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Let us stack arms.

The Rude Faun

O goddess, I dare not question you, but it is not probable that you descended from high Olympus to visit two young fauns.

Minerva

Such a declension would be contrary to my nature.

The Elegant Faun

Can we be of any service to you?

The Rude Faun

Do you want us to leave you alone?

Minerva

I came to you because I was attracted by the sound of a flute. I fear I have lost the right path. Where am I? Is this a sacred forest? For several minutes I have been walking along beautiful alleys without meeting a single human being.

The Rude Faun

You see; — this is an orange grove.

The Elegant Faun

The nymphs from the Mediterranean come here to gambol under these trees with the amorous fauns. Here the dryads welcome Triton and his brothers. Even the land receives the kisses of the waves.

THE RUDE FAUN

You see; — this is an orange grove. The fruit is as brilliant as the golden apples Jason plucked in the enchanted gardens. Inhale this delicious fragrance mingled with the odors borne by the sea breezes.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

You see; — this is an orange grove.

MINERVA

This must be the place where she descended.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Who?

MINERVA

Haven't you seen a being with light hair?

THE RUDE FAUN

With hair of gold?

MINERVA

If you put it that way. And sparkless eyes.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

With caressing eyes?

MINERVA

You might say that. Her mouth is ridiculously small!

THE RUDE FAUN

It is like a red berry which entices and yet retards our dashes among the copses.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

I knew that she was an immortal.

MINERVA

I did not say so.

THE RUDE FAUN

You said she must have *descended*. Who except a divinity could descend from heaven?

MINERVA

The day will come when daring men will descend from it. That will be one of my benefactions — a triumph of science.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

We know, Minerva, all that mankind owes to you. We venerate you.

MINERVA

But you love her.

THE RUDE FAUN

We are not men. We are fauns. Your triumph would kill instinct, great goddess. The other is our ally.

MINERVA

Then you recognized her?

THE RUDE FAUN

'Tis Aphrodite. Born of the depths of the sea! Her body is supple as the movements of the waves!

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Her nails are as rosy as sea-shells. And her hair is made of the rays of the dazzling sun.

THE RUDE FAUN

We shall go seek her and announce your coming.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

And the grove of oranges will be still more beautiful because Aphrodite has embellished it with her slumber, her presence, her smile.

THE RUDE FAUN

Aphrodite!

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Aphrodite!

(Aphrodite appears)

APHRODITE

But who told you — ? Ah, Minerva! You!

MINERVA

Hail, Aphrodite!

APHRODITE

Hail! Run away, little fauns. Go play with my young nymph who is sighing, she's so bored.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

We may return?

APHRODITE

Yes.

THE RUDE FAUN

You are not going to slip away and soar to heaven?

APHRODITE

No! Begone!

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Aphrodite!

THE RUDE FAUN

Aphrodite!

(The fauns move out of sight)

APHRODITE

Well! Goddess of wisdom, to what do I owe the honor of this visit?

MINERVA

Aphrodite, renounce your ironical, hostile tone. You should welcome me joyfully. I bring you the pardon of the gods.

APHRODITE

Really?

MINERVA

They promise to forget the events which for the past few days have ruffled the serenity of Mount Olympus.

APHRODITE

Zeus frowns no longer?

MINERVA

No.

APHRODITE

Juno no longer emits her peahen cries?

MINERVA

She will smile upon you.

APHRODITE

And you?

MINERVA

I am come as a messenger of peace.

APHRODITE

Yet you were so severe — pitiless — the other day —

MINERVA

Let us forget that unpleasant time. Let us not mention that grievous incident.

APHRODITE

Why not? I am not ashamed at having been taken with Mars in the net fabricated by Vulcan with such conjugal patience.

MINERVA

What! Can you without blushing —

APHRODITE

Yes, I can. Attracted by the cries of that — husband, all the gods hastened to gaze upon my form in the golden meshes. I resembled an oriental courtesan. But Mars cut a pitiable figure.

MINERVA

What did you expect him to do for you?

APHRODITE

Love me! Not let himself be intimidated by the presence of the gods and my husband! But no! He hung his head, like a child detected in a fault. It is at such times that a woman knows the real worth of a lover.

MINERVA

Then you are sorry that you deceived Vulcan?

APHRODITE

Yes, Minerva, you may say I am sorry.

MINERVA

Truly? You repent?

APHRODITE

I repent for having so badly chosen my accomplice.

MINERVA

Oh! Aphrodite!

APHRODITE

Beneath all his dazzling armor, Minerva, Mars has nothing. He has no heart. And that is true of all the gods!

MINERVA

What do you know of that?

APHRODITE

You can take my word for it.

MINERVA

I am pleased to find you so totally disillusioned. You will no longer seek silly adventures, and from now on you will remain tranquil.

APHRODITE

Certainly, no more disorder will be stirred up in that holy dwelling by me.

MINERVA

So that is settled.

APHRODITE

For I shall never go back to it.

MINERVA

But why not? Why not?

APHRODITE

Because, chaste Minerva, I am afraid I should be bored. You drove me out of heaven; you banished me to the earth—

MINERVA

The necessity of the moment! There had been a scandal. Now we call you back. We are reinstating you.

APHRODITE

You are extremely kind. But I have taken my leave.

MINERVA

You are mad! Reflect!

APHRODITE

I have reflected.

MINERVA

Just consider how agreeable it is to be a goddess.

APHRODITE

It is more agreeable to be a woman.

MINERVA

In spite of all your efforts you can not renounce your eternal youth, your immortality.

APHRODITE

I have no desire to grow old or to die. I willingly resign myself to remaining always irresistible.

MINERVA

What shall become of us?

APHRODITE

You will continue to reign over the universe.

MINERVA

Oh, if you only knew the sadness of our existence since you left us!

APHRODITE

Tell me about it.

MINERVA

At first, all the gods were pleased. As they were all jealous of the favors you had done Mars, they congratulated themselves on your punishment. For they all have a deep sense of justice. The goddesses, relieved of a rival, embraced one another. But soon a great melancholy weighed upon our assembly. The light seemed to pale. We feared darkness and cold. It was because you were no longer there, Aphrodite, dear. Come back, and reanimate the gods!

APHRODITE

No! I shall reanimate men!

MINERVA

Foolish!

APHRODITE

They shall love me and give me great joys. Didn't you see those two young creatures? They adore me. They are gracious, intelligent, yet withal, supple and warm as animals.

MINERVA

I can see clearly enough, Aphrodite, that those young fauns are more clever than sincere.

APHRODITE

Ah, Minerva! Address is worth more than sincerity. Eh! Whether they lie or speak the truth, whether they are perfidious or innocent, the inhabitants of the

earth are preoccupied with nothing except love. They dream of nothing except kneeling before my sanctuary. What difference does it make what route they travel to come at last to me? They gambol like brutes, or they pace gravely with eyes raised to the stars. Plunging deep in pleasure, they rise to the skies. These are compounded of animals and gods. So to represent the innumerable throng of my faithful, I shall always keep beside me two little fauns with savage caressing eyes.

MINERVA

But—

APHRODITE

Do not insist. This is the time when one of my lovers comes to visit me.

MINERVA

I leave you. But remember that Olympus awaits your return. You have only to mount to its height.

APHRODITE

Adieu!

MINERVA

Until I see you again!

(She starts off)

This man in the rich costume approaching—is he your lover?

APHRODITE

Very likely.

MINERVA

He is no longer young.

APHRODITE

Then that is my lover, surely.

MINERVA

But he is skilfully made up. So then, you are interested in old men?

APHRODITE

Divinity should be gracious to the nobility of the effort and the energy of the intention.

MINERVA

Until I see you again!

(Minerva leaves. The Old Man appears.)

THE OLD MAN

Who is the beautiful woman I just met?

APHRODITE

One of my friends. You think her attractive?

THE OLD MAN

Oh! She has a noble air and mysterious eyes. I like to be seen with a woman who carries herself well and seems to think.

APHRODITE

Yes! That's flattering. People often judge a man by his company, and an ugly fellow is credited with lov-

ing intelligence and beauty simply because he has a pretentious mistress.

THE OLD MAN

You are right. She is not beautiful.

APHRODITE

Oh, pardon me! I do not find her ugly. She is one of my friends, as I told you. But I do not understand how she could please you. I thought you like luxuriousness.

THE OLD MAN

True! That is a merit no one denies me.

APHRODITE

Well, then?

THE OLD MAN

So, it is you, delicious creature, whom I adore. But you never encourage me.

APHRODITE

You have known me three days, and you have permission to spend delightful minutes with me.

THE OLD MAN

It's true. We converse together.

APHRODITE

What did you expect?

THE OLD MAN

Kisses! Caresses!

APHRODITE

Really?

THE OLD MAN

Don't you aspire — as I do — to the transports of love?

APHRODITE

Young man!

THE OLD MAN

Ah! If you would only love me — or pretend to love me —

APHRODITE

What would you do?

THE OLD MAN

Give you gold — pearls —

APHRODITE

Child! I have both gold and pearls.

THE OLD MAN

Yes! Yes! You are going to tell me that your hair is gold and your teeth are pearls.

APHRODITE

No, my friend. I assure you I am quite rich. Plutus is at my command.

THE OLD MAN

Plutus! The wealthiest of all financiers.

APHRODITE

I need only dive into the sea to bring up pearls.

THE OLD MAN

Ah! Good! Good! That's merely a poetical expression.

APHRODITE

'Tis the truth.

THE OLD MAN

Yes? Then you bathe frequently?

APHRODITE

Often.

THE OLD MAN

I must confess to you — often I fear I do not understand the mysterious meanings of your remarks.

APHRODITE

It's quite simple. I have a great fortune.

THE OLD MAN

That's too bad.

APHRODITE

Why?

THE OLD MAN

I fear I shall have no prestige for you. I know that women love above all else the presents I give them. When they smile upon me, they smile in the hope of a necklace or a country house.

APHRODITE

I do not disdain your gifts.

THE OLD MAN

But what present can I make to move you?

APHRODITE

Give me all your wealth.

THE OLD MAN

What?

APHRODITE

Give me your palatial home, your gardens, your woods, your vineyards, your cattle, and your ships which carry precious stuffs across the seas.

THE OLD MAN

But —

APHRODITE

You hesitate?

THE OLD MAN

It's because I have a wife — children —

APHRODITE

You do not love me! And I was almost ready to cede to the lure of your words. You were lying!

THE OLD MAN

I am not a miser. See now! Make a more reasonable wish. I am ready to fulfill it. I knew it would be an extravagant one when you told me you are rich.

APHRODITE

I want all your property.

THE OLD MAN

But what would you do with it since Plutus protects you? You have no need for my money.

APHRODITE

I must ruin you to prove that you love me.

THE OLD MAN

Listen! You drive me frantic! No woman has ever spoken to me so.

APHRODITE

You must have had affairs with stupid ones.

THE OLD MAN

I have trifled — just hear this — with the demands of the most renowned courtesans.

APHRODITE

Your renowned creatures were mere children of the streets.

THE OLD MAN

If you will be satisfied with a quarter!

APHRODITE

I want all.

THE OLD MAN

With half!

APHRODITE

I want all.

THE OLD MAN

You are out of your senses. Could any one imagine such a demand! Your base cupidity makes me blush.

APHRODITE

Pardon me! I can not let you speak so to me. Did I come troubling your peace? Did I beckon you by the expression of my eyes, or a movement of my lips? I was asleep on this couch of roses when you stopped.

THE OLD MAN

You were so beautiful!

APHRODITE

You woke me. You spoke flattering and stammering words to me, just as every man does in such a case.

THE OLD MAN

I was sincere.

APHRODITE

As desire.

THE OLD MAN

I adore you!

APHRODITE

I ask a proof of your love.

THE OLD MAN

My entire fortune!

APHRODITE

You refuse me; that's your business. I am not at all hurt. I can forget all the things we have spoken in the past three days. It was only a dream. I shall lie down again upon my couch of roses.

(She does so)

I am going to sleep. Good night.

THE OLD MAN

Good night.

(He starts away, then returns)

Speak to me at least one kindly word. Wake up! Open your eyes! Don't let me go away thus. Have you no pity for my grief? I don't even know your name, yet you ask all my riches. Ah! No! No! You are beautiful! But there are others. First of all there's my mistress — yes, my mistress. She adores me, yet I was ready to desert her for you. And she's not a common sort either, you know. She doesn't stretch out like you beside the highways. She is an artist, an actress. In a little theater patronized by sailors she poses as the goddesses. She is not less attractive than Juno — and even Aphrodite. You hear? I love her! I love her! I was crazy. What? I thought you said something. Only a sigh? You won't speak a word? You're pretending to sleep. I know you're not asleep. Open your eyes. Just one word! I beg you! One word! You want all my money, eh? All my money!

The money I have gained by my whole life. Money I have conquered from men by my toil, my courage, even crimes. The money for which I have agonized, trembled, killed! And all you have to do to get it is to ask me for it? You are ridiculous and vain! You shall not have it! You shall not have it! You hear me? But say something! Just one word! I know you are listening to me. Eh? I am more firm than you thought. I mock at your dazzling hair, and your smiling mouth! Your mouth! Your mouth! Well, then! Well, then! Take my money! Take all my money! All! All! But speak a word! Just one word!

APHRODITE

(Rising)

Thanks!

(The Actress nears)

THE ACTRESS

Well? When will you be done showing yourself off before this light-of-love?

THE OLD MAN

But — you are — mistaken —

THE ACTRESS

I never knew you cared for girls of the roadsides.

THE OLD MAN

I assure you —

THE ACTRESS

Why do you risk your health by coming to this forest? You could have found what you wanted back there in the streets of the town. They prowl about the military camps which guard the city.

THE OLD MAN

Silence! I forbid you —

APHRODITE

Please let her go on.

THE ACTRESS

You intercede for me? You are too kind!

THE OLD MAN

But —

APHRODITE

I do not know you, but I sympathize with you.

THE OLD MAN

It seems to me —

THE ACTRESS

You must be crazy or you have lost all sense of dignity to let a creature who lolls along the roads speak to me.

THE OLD MAN

I want to explain —

APHRODITE

Have you taken the vow of chastity? Are you a priestess of modesty?

THE ACTRESS

Don't insult me!

APHRODITE

I thought you — as I am — a votary of Aphrodite.

THE ACTRESS

I may have the manner.

APHRODITE

Oho!

THE ACTRESS

There are rich courtesans admired by all the world; obscure ones who live like matrons respected by all; unfortunates who arouse in their fellow townspeople a just contempt.

APHRODITE

And you belong to the first group?

THE ACTRESS

I am not a courtesan, my dear. I am an actress.

THE OLD MAN

That's true. She impersonates the goddesses before an applauding public.

THE ACTRESS

I am at the Little Theater at the port. Perhaps you go there at times? Have you seen me in *Aphrodite?*

APHRODITE

I live in the open air. I seldom go indoors.

THE OLD MAN

You are sadly mistaken if you think you have before you a poor outcast. She is a very rich courtesan. She ought to be a friend of yours.

THE ACTRESS

What is her name? What men are interested in her career? Where is her house?

APHRODITE

I do not know exactly. I can not retain details.

THE ACTRESS

A fashionable woman! But look at her. Her regularly featured face inspires respect.

THE OLD MAN

Eh! Eh! But she has such eyes!

THE ACTRESS

I tell you she is beautiful.

APHRODITE

You are too kind!

THE ACTRESS

Yes, you are beautiful, but men are like ice before pure beauty.

THE OLD MAN

Not all of them! Not all!

THE ACTRESS

And you are too tall to wear well the ingenious gowns our designers create every season. They drape for the medium figure. You are far above it.

APHRODITE

Really?

THE ACTRESS

One can easily see that your body is harmonious. Your waist is not too small. Your hips are not abnormally developed. You do not seem able to put on or take off flesh according to the demands of the styles. You are fixed. You are a type. You will never be in the height of fashion.

APHRODITE

Then you would advise me to give up the career?

THE ACTRESS

Oh, you may pick up some fool who will be smitten by your perfection. But when he introduces you to his comrades and sees how coldly they inspect you, he will soon abandon you.

THE OLD MAN

Never! Never!

THE ACTRESS

What did you say?

THE OLD MAN

Nothing!

APHRODITE

Speak!

THE ACTRESS

(In a tragic tone)

Ah! You love her! You love her!

THE OLD MAN

I beg you! Be still! Be brave!

(The Actress covers her face and weeps)

THE OLD MAN

No one is master of his feelings. I have adored you for three years. Besides I could no longer give you all the delights —

THE ACTRESS

You are not so old!

THE OLD MAN

No! But I am poor.

THE ACTRESS

Your fortune?

THE OLD MAN

Dissipated!

THE ACTRESS

Ah! I thank the gods for putting me to this test. You will now see that it was not your money I worshipped.

APHRODITE

No!

THE ACTRESS

I don't see why this creature should doubt my sincerity.

THE OLD MAN

She really never was mercenary.

THE ACTRESS

I met him in the plains of Syria in the harvest time.

APHRODITE

Just as Ruth went to Boaz.

THE ACTRESS

You can not imagine how many young girls were tempted by the example of Ruth. They all became gleaners and hovered about the rich landowners — especially the old feeble ones. In that way they contracted either respectable marriages or profitable unions.

THE OLD MAN

But you — you were sincere.

APHRODITE

Who could doubt it?

THE ACTRESS

I was eighteen. I was poor, but honest.

THE OLD MAN

That is true! That is true!

THE ACTRESS

At the end of the summer I was on his lands.

APHRODITE

By accident?

THE ACTRESS

By accident. One evening he saw me —

THE OLD MAN

As Boaz saw Ruth.

THE ACTRESS

I was following the harvesters, picking up the stalks which dropped — and I heard him say to his workmen, "Be sure to let some fall."

APHRODITE

How kind he was!

THE ACTRESS

Just like Boaz. He had great pastures, many animals, chests filled with precious metals, yet he humbled himself to distribute small alms.

APHRODITE

"Be sure to let some fall," he said.

THE ACTRESS

Wasn't it splendid? The memory of his generosity will be preserved by future centuries.

THE OLD MAN

You are exaggerating.

APHRODITE

Poets will chant your charity.

THE OLD MAN

This is too much.

THE ACTRESS

No! No! For you gave a crust of bread to those who were dying of starvation.

APHRODITE

"Be sure to let some fall," he said.

THE ACTRESS

Generous!

APHRODITE

Philanthropist!

THE ACTRESS

And this was not all!

THE OLD MAN

You make me blush.

The Actress

You must know. Not satisfied with offering me the grain, he offered his love with it.

Aphrodite

So old Boaz bought the youth of Ruth for a piece of bread.

The Actress

What edifying customs!

Aphrodite

You did not repulse him?

The Actress

I loved him —

The Old Man

Darling!

The Actress

He led me to his dwelling.

Aphrodite

You were innocent?

The Actress

Naturally! And he initiated me into the mysteries of Aphrodite.

The Old Man

That night!

THE ACTRESS

I shall never forget! What tenderness he showed!

APHRODITE

No brutality, then?

THE ACTRESS

None. I smiled slightly as I recalled his order.

APHRODITE

"Be sure to let some fall," he said.

THE OLD MAN

My love!

THE ACTRESS

After that I remained with him. He had me take singing lessons. He developed my spirit as well as my body. I became an actress. And today he casts me off!

APHRODITE

No! He will stay with you.

THE OLD MAN

But—

APHRODITE

He has offered me a precious gift which I can not accept.

THE ACTRESS

You dare offer a precious gift to another woman besides me?

Aphrodite

No! To a goddess!

The Actress

What?

Aphrodite

You failed to recognize Aphrodite?

(The Old Man and the Actress prostrate themselves)

The Actress

Pardon me, Divinity, the impious words I have spoken.

Aphrodite

Oh, at times I rather like being treated brutally.

The Old Man

At least, you will allow me to make a sacrifice for you?

Aphrodite

No blood! Set free two white doves who will soar towards Olympus.

The Old Man

I shall also deck your statue with a necklace.

Aphrodite

My statue! But for you my representation on earth should be your young sweetheart. My temple is your chamber; my altar, your bed. Hang about her neck the pearls you intended for my image.

THE ACTRESS

Thanks!

APHRODITE

Go! Cherish her! You saw that she was willing to live with you in your misery.

THE OLD MAN

True! True!

APHRODITE

She is sincere!

THE OLD MAN

May you be blessed, O Aphrodite, for showing me all the love my beloved feels for me.

THE ACTRESS

Let us go!

APHRODITE

No! You remain a little while.

THE OLD MAN

O Divinity!

(He goes off)

APHRODITE

I should like to know, Faithful One, why you were so mild, so calm, so loving when you heard of that individual's ruin.

THE ACTRESS

I thought it must be a test. I couldn't believe that he could become poor in a few minutes. It was to my

advantage to prove my loyalty. It was a splendid occasion.

APHRODITE

That's exactly what I thought. But I was not sure of it. You don't lack assurance.

THE ACTRESS

I know my business.

APHRODITE

You look after it well!

THE ACTRESS

This is my recompense. I knew misery once.

APHRODITE

When you met him?

THE ACTRESS

Oh, no! At that time I wasn't without resources. Just like many others I was trying the poor gleaner rôle. But I had many jewels already. It was before that — when I started out —

APHRODITE

Would you have grown hardened?

THE ACTRESS

Can you think so? I had a great deal of temperament.

APHRODITE

You please me. I should be glad to fulfill one of your desires.

THE ACTRESS

I wish — and this is the dream of all my friends — I wish near me a young man, ardent, free from all prejudice, and exempt from all jealousy. To come when I call him. To charm me by his graciousness and his joyous fervor. To be almost a pet to caress and be thankful to me for my attention.

APHRODITE

I shall grant you what you desire.

(She picks up the flute dropped upon the bed of roses by the Faun, and plays upon it. The Elegant Faun enters, and without hesitating, goes straight to the Actress. During the following, Aphrodite retires to the rear. She looks on at the developments, but takes no part in them.)

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Sweet music called me to your beauty. Is it you, Dear Unknown, that favoring fate unites to my youth? For months I have sought you without finding you. I ran through the copses, through the forest, pursuing my dream. Are you the visionary form who always evaded me? Is it true that I shall seize you?

THE ACTRESS

I have expected you!

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Yes, it is you! I have yearned for your laughing eyes — lying, also; your joyous, tasting lips; your dilating

nose, which inhales all the ardent intoxications; your flesh, soft, firm, glowing!

THE ACTRESS

I have waited for you. O my little lover, follow me to my dwelling. It is surrounded by ancient trees sloping majestically down to the river. When you are weary of the house you will bound across the fields and dream of the shadows in the pines, stretched at length upon the moss. I shall not shut you up in my room as in a cage. You will be free in my arms. My love will not be a prison for you.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Come!

THE ACTRESS

Yes; hold me close to your animal body and give me your eye in which thought dawns.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

You are comfortable?

THE ACTRESS

I am so happy that I feel that I adore you.

(Embracing, they move away. Just as they are about to pass from view, there appear with their arms about each other, the Rude Faun and the Nymph.)

THE RUDE FAUN

You must not go without us.

NYMPH

We shall join your procession.

THE RUDE FAUN

She knows how I love her —

NYMPH

Yes, down there, on the soft grass.

THE RUDE FAUN

My feelings were so violent that the pearls of her tunic were torn away.

NYMPH

They rolled away into the grass. But I do not regret them.

THE ACTRESS

Come!

(The two couples move out of sight. Aphrodite follows them with an approving glance. From the opposite side Minerva enters.)

MINERVA

And those are the pleasures you call love!

APHRODITE

Don't speak of things beyond your knowledge, virtuous Goddess.

MINERVA

It is because I am virtuous that I know real passion.

APHRODITE

You think so?

MINERVA

The Old Man, the Actress, the Fauns, the Nymph merely go through the actions of loving.

APHRODITE

So that's it!

MINERVA

Begone, light Goddess; true lovers will always turn from your easy intoxication.

APHRODITE

And be drawn by your thought?

MINERVA

Most assuredly!

APHRODITE

Then you are the goddess of love?

MINERVA

Yes, if love resides within the heart and in the mind.

APHRODITE

Oho!

MINERVA

Real lovers, let me tell you, are united by their sentiments and thoughts.

APHRODITE

How can you know you love a person before being held in his arms?

MINERVA

You make me blush!

APHRODITE

Drawn by his intelligence and character, just suppose his lips are not enticing? Enraptured by his genius and his heroism, his touch fails to stir in you the thrill you yearn for!

MINERVA

Impossible!

APHRODITE

If this is not true, then all great men would be adored. What would be left for the mediocre and the great crowd of less fortunate ones?

MINERVA

You are the goddess of the lower orders!

APHRODITE

Of all the lowly! You may hold in contempt the attractions of the flesh, you may speak with disgust of my power. Yet I am the one who consoles the unfortunate. I grant them divine moments. They soar above the earth; they are happier than sovereigns, the rich, artists applauded by crowds. Such a beggar knows a joy forever beyond the realization of a king — or even a financier.

MINERVA

You pick your favorites from the mire.

APHRODITE

Often! Why should the virtuous have the additional joy of love? Let each have his desserts!

MINERVA

Are you never generous to purity?

APHRODITE

Sometimes I can't help being. Besides I must have pity on the young and sincere. They have no defense. They always desire eternal, absolute felicity. They forget that they are only mortals.

MINERVA

If you speak truth, you should not remain on earth—

APHRODITE

And my friends? The selfish, the vicious, the powerful, all those who are as like me as brothers? And those you despise but whom I adore! The evening is coming. Think of the impending kisses! Think of the comforting caresses!

MINERVA

Think of all the deceptions, the despairs! Come!

APHRODITE

My place is here.

MINERVA

Do not be cruel. Olympus calls you!

APHRODITE

Too late! Leave me. See the youth who used to laugh before he saw me.

MINERVA

You will not commit a crime?

APHRODITE

I am not evil. But he must be mine.

MINERVA

Why?

APHRODITE

For my joy!

MINERVA

Monstrous!

APHRODITE

And also that humanity shall hear beautiful poems, see beautiful statues, and beautiful pictures.

MINERVA

Beauty is serenity. Before the tranquil lines of my temple the entire universe will kneel.

APHRODITE

But before my image the future will weep with grief and hope. You are repose; but I am life! You are wisdom; but I am ecstasy!

MINERVA

I am clear and bright as the noonday sun.

APHRODITE

But I am the irresistible charm of dawn and twilight — and my hour has come.

(Minerva goes off. Aphrodite steps back, and extends her arms to the approaching youth.)

APHRODITE

(In a low voice)

Come! My young lover! Come to me!

(She moves back, still holding out her arms. The Youth enters slowly, thrilled with love.)

THE YOUTH

It seemed that you called me!

APHRODITE

I was waiting for you.

(She holds out her hands. He casts aside a small sack, and springs towards her.)

THE YOUTH

You — whom I love!

APHRODITE

Hush! Do not speak imprudent words.

THE YOUTH

I adore you!

APHRODITE

How do you know that you like a fruit before you taste it?

THE YOUTH

My fingers know the sweetness of your arms and shoulders. I inhale the perfume of your hair. And

leaning over you, I drink in the essence of your beauty.

APHRODITE

You have gazed upon the fruit. You have smelt it. But you do not know its flavor. My lips may not please yours.

THE YOUTH

No!

APHRODITE

Perhaps —

THE YOUTH

What?

APHRODITE

You know very well what I mean.

THE YOUTH

Well?

APHRODITE

Perhaps you will be disappointed.

THE YOUTH

Impossible. All the joys I could hope for, you will give me. You are as radiant as an immortal — as the most beautiful of the immortals.

APHRODITE

As Aphrodite?

THE YOUTH

Yes; as Aphrodite!

APHRODITE

Sacrilege!

THE YOUTH

I often ask myself whether you are not really the potent goddess.

APHRODITE

You are trying to win me by flattery.

THE YOUTH

No! I am telling the truth! Often when you gaze at me, I think I see in your eyes a supernatural flame.

APHRODITE

Child!

THE YOUTH

And I lower my head.

APHRODITE

You are wrong.

THE YOUTH

I want to seize you. But you make so noble a gesture that I am stopped by an almost religious awe.

APHRODITE

You are timid. That is because of your age.

THE YOUTH

No! The young girls of the town do not inspire such fears.

APHRODITE

Bah!

THE YOUTH

I swear it.

APHRODITE

They aren't cruel, are they?

THE YOUTH

I'm not so old. Quite naturally they are not afraid of me.

APHRODITE

You are modest. Confess that all of them desire your kisses.

THE YOUTH

You are mocking me.

APHRODITE

No!

THE YOUTH

They are more attracted by one of my comrades — he's a blacksmith.

APHRODITE

Like Vulcan! The stupid things!

THE YOUTH

He can easily swing the sledge hammer, and his brawny arms are like venerable oak.

APHRODITE

Yes! We have all been won by physical force.

THE YOUTH

You see!

APHRODITE

But we always repent it!

THE YOUTH

Then they are very fond of one of my friends who tells good stories. He is not handsome, but they can't keep their faces straight before his grimaces.

APHRODITE

Make them laugh! Make them laugh!

THE YOUTH

But I am not droll; I am not powerful. I can not tell you —

APHRODITE

I want to know.

THE YOUTH

They say I am woman-like.

APHRODITE

True!

THE YOUTH

Oh! You are mocking me!

APHRODITE

Do you believe that?

THE YOUTH

I spoke only because you wished it. I obey you. I am yours. I dare not resist you.

APHRODITE

Yes, you told me; I make you afraid.

THE YOUTH

A little —

APHRODITE

But I am not evil.

THE YOUTH

No!

APHRODITE

Well then?

THE YOUTH

I do not know — I do not understand —

APHRODITE

Then you don't think me beautiful?

THE YOUTH

Too beautiful!

APHRODITE

Well? And I hold out my arms!

THE YOUTH

I fall at your feet.

APHRODITE

So be it! But kneel nearer my couch.

THE YOUTH

I dare not approach —

APHRODITE

But you are mad. Minerva must restore your wits.

(Minerva returns)

MINERVA

You called me?

THE YOUTH

Ah!

APHRODITE

What?

MINERVA

You want me to restore his wits?

APHRODITE

Certainly not! That is merely a fashion of speaking.

MINERVA

Ah! Very well!

(She disappears)

THE YOUTH

You see! You see!

APHRODITE

What is it?

THE YOUTH

You have only to call and Minerva descends from high Olympus.

APHRODITE

This is only a dream disturbing your thoughts.

THE YOUTH

She was here with us — the goddess with the meditative eyes.

APHRODITE

You are certainly asleep. Wake up!

THE YOUTH

No! No! It was not a false image. You command the immortals. You are not a woman, but a supernatural creature. I perceived it before. That was why I feared to abandon myself to passion.

APHRODITE

(Stroking his brow)

Calm yourself! Can you feel the coolness of my hands on your brow?

THE YOUTH

They are as light and fragrant as the breath of spring.

APHRODITE

(Holding him close, and rocking him)

Little one! my dear little one!

THE YOUTH

I was afraid.

APHRODITE

You are still trembling.

THE YOUTH

Yet I am no longer afraid.

APHRODITE

You are fragile and pretty as a child.

THE YOUTH

Your voice is calm and motherly.

APHRODITE

That is because I have a son.

THE YOUTH

No!

APHRODITE

Yes!

THE YOUTH

Is he like me?

APHRODITE

No! He has wild eyes and dark hair.

THE YOUTH

Is he gentle?

APHRODITE

He is fierce! He shoots poisonous arrows at men and women.

THE YOUTH

Poisoned? No! He is too weak to be able to wound people.

APHRODITE

Perhaps!

THE YOUTH

What is his name?

APHRODITE

What difference does it make?

THE YOUTH

I want to know so that I may repeat it softly.

APHRODITE

You will know soon enough.

THE YOUTH

I feel so happy against your shoulder.

APHRODITE

Yes?

THE YOUTH

I love you!

APHRODITE

You must not love me.

THE YOUTH

I implore you!

APHRODITE

No! No!

THE YOUTH

Give me your lips!

APHRODITE

I don't want to! I don't want to! I have pity on your youth!

THE YOUTH

If you pity me, grant me a kiss. I adore you.

APHRODITE

Ah! Don't press me so tightly! Your eyes are no longer child-like.

THE YOUTH

I want your embrace!

APHRODITE

I can see the looks of the fauns.

THE YOUTH

There are no more fauns — only men.

APHRODITE

Deceiving and lying fauns!

(The two Fauns come in)

THE ELEGANT FAUN

Here we are, mistress!

THE RUDE FAUN

We are ready to serve you!

THE ELEGANT FAUN

You have honored us with admirable gifts! The beautiful girl is veiled in her loosened hair.

THE RUDE FAUN

And the Nymph sings your glory!

THE ELEGANT FAUN

What do you want of us?

APHRODITE

Nothing, my little fauns. Leave us.

(The Fauns go out)

THE YOUTH

Will you still say I am dreaming? Didn't I see two young fauns?

APHRODITE

My servants.

THE YOUTH

Has any woman ever been served by fauns?

APHRODITE

Often.

THE YOUTH

Admit that you are a supernatural creature.

APHRODITE

Why do you worry yourself? If I were nymph or goddess should I be less dear? Should I love you less?

THE YOUTH

You understand that I love you? Nymph, you will imprison me beneath the bark of the trees or you will plunge me into the waves. Goddess, you will float off to the crest of Olympus. And I shall be here alone, weeping over your loss.

APHRODITE

At least you will have had the intoxication of the moment.

THE YOUTH

That is all I ask of life! But why yearn for the impossible? You are not like women. You hardly touch the ground. You seem to be on the point of flying away.

APHRODITE

I shall remain with you.

THE YOUTH

Ah! I would clothe you in the crude materials produced by our fields—

APHRODITE

Aren't these tissues more attractive?

THE YOUTH

Your bare feet are not fixed upon our earth. I must fix them.

APHRODITE

By heavy sandals?

THE YOUTH

By gracious slippers.

APHRODITE

You want me to become a village maiden? Like all the others? You would lower me?

THE YOUTH

Not to feel unworthy of you. Not to fear always that you will abandon me.

APHRODITE

You would impose bonds upon me?

THE YOUTH

Yes. For I adore you jealously — as a man!

APHRODITE

(In a long sigh)

Oh!

(From his sack he draws two exquisite slippers)

THE YOUTH

See these slippers. I made them from precious wood. I polished them. Let me slip them on your feet.

(He kneels)

You consent?

APHRODITE

Yes!

(The Fauns, the Nymph, the Actress, bearing bunches of flowers, enter)

THE ELEGANT FAUN

A miracle!

THE RUDE FAUN

A miracle!

NYMPH

These new flowers have sprung from the earth!

THE ACTRESS

They have the shape of a slipper.

(Minerva enters)

MINERVA

They are lady's-slippers! Let them always be so called in honor of Aphrodite.

THE RUDE FAUN

(Kneeling before Aphrodite)

Her bare foot only touched the slippers and behold! a marvelous flowering of new plants!

THE YOUTH

Aphrodite! Aphrodite!

APHRODITE

(Rising)

Yes! I am Aphrodite.

(She stretches her arms to the Youth who moves towards her)

Receive my kiss.

THE YOUTH

Aphrodite!

(He recoils. Three dancers appear and offer bunches of lady's-slippers to him. He presses them to his face. Music begins.)

THE YOUTH

Aphrodite!

(He falls gradually upon the couch of roses. Every one bows, while the three dancers dance around the couch.)

APHRODITE

Shed no tears, my friends. Aphrodite kills only to revive. The Youth who dies at the kiss of Aphrodite is gone for only a day. So Endymion expired at the kiss of Diana — yet it was merely the divine passing of the night. You grow pale beneath the fervid embrace — and behold, already you are reborn for more.

(The Youth slowly rises)

The arms that enclosed you stretch out vainly to seize their loved burden again. You pluck from the tree of life the new fruit which attracts your desire. This is the triumph of youth.

MINERVA

It is the triumph of Aphrodite.

THE YOUTH

It is the triumph of spring.

(And in fact the characters are ranged as the figures in the "Spring" of Botticelli. In the center is Aphrodite. At her right are the three dancers; a little further off the Youth gathering the golden fruit. At the left of Aphrodite are Minerva, the Actress, the Nymph. Near Aphrodite, crouching and watching her, are the two little Fauns.)

CURTAIN

(The curtain rises again upon a landscape with calm features. Marine pines and cypresses lead down to the peaceful sea. Aphrodite is trying to resuscitate the Youth. She almost succeeds. But the shadows of night enter and veil the supreme shimmerings of the day. Then follows the Ballet of Night sinking into the arms of a fervid Love. This redoubtable Eros triumphs even over the pure Milky Way. Diana and Endymion hymn their love; and the shepherd dies on the lips of the goddess. Suddenly the rays of Dawn appear, and again the dazzling Aphrodite is omnipotent. She is surrounded by all the characters of

the comedy. They pronounce the verses to give the audience the moral of the piece — for it is fitting that spectators carry a lesson away from the theater.)

APHRODITE

After the darkness comes the dawn.
Why seek a moral more than this?
All life is 'round this precept drawn —
After the darkness comes the dawn.

MINERVA

(Bowing before Aphrodite)

Nothing can stir in life like love.
My wisdom lacks deep joys like this.
After the darkness comes the dawn.
Why seek a moral more than this?

(In the distance begins the melody of a flute. It continues until the end.)

THE YOUTH

A dream within the forest shades —
A faun who plays upon his flute —
In vain resist, repulse, dispute.
O Aphrodite, thine the power. —
A faun who plays upon his flute.

THE ELEGANT FAUN

In summer if you listen still,
That melody floats down the hill.

THE ACTRESS

'Tis Pan who pipes that melody.
His music ends the comedy.

THE RUDE FAUN

(To the Nymph)

Listen, O my charmer. A trilling sound from far,
A dying air, it stirs your blood, it sweeps from out the south.
You feel a kiss upon your lips? Ah, no! And yet they are
Half opened for the kiss your lover presses on your mouth.

NYMPH

This music seizes all of us — an ecstasy of love!
It interlaces all our hearts, we mount and soar above!

APHRODITE

(To the audience)

Learn how to welcome these joys absolute —
And follow in the woods the Faun who plays upon his flute.

CURTAIN

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